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JAIR ROSE FROM THE GROUND LIKE A YOUNG EAGLE

JAIR
THE APOSTATE

BY

A. G. HALES

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. H. BUCKLAND

METHUEN & CO.
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LONDON
1902

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TO
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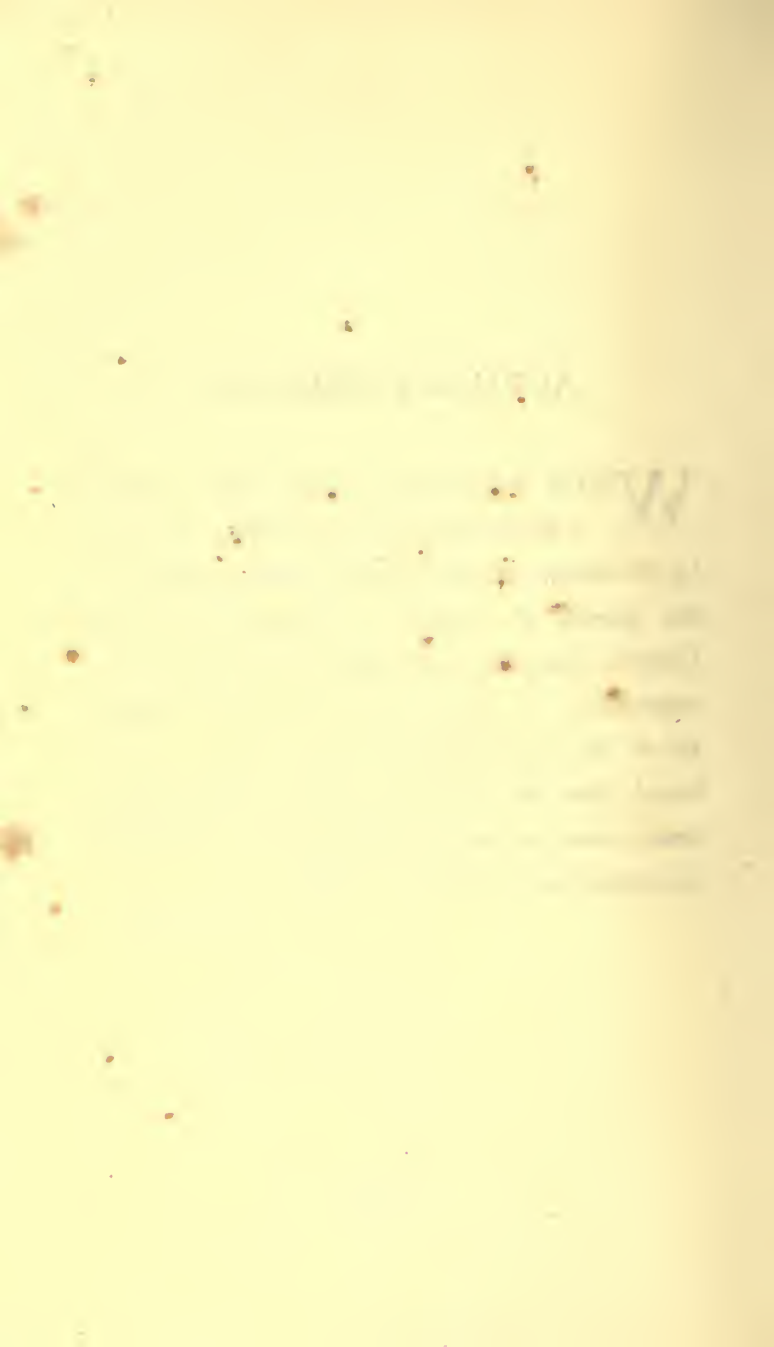
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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

WHEN my friend Frank Lyall returned from China, after the sacking of Peking by the troops of the Christian world, he gave me the benefit of his years of research amongst Chinese literature; and I should like to take this opportunity of thanking him for much valuable aid in the compilation of this volume. If our friend *Jair the Apostate*, robbed of his Chinese finery, seems to you a weakling, try and remember what a lot such a dress can cover.

A. G. H.



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MEMORANDUM

TO : [Illegible]

FROM : [Illegible]

SUBJECT : [Illegible]

[Illegible text follows, including a list of items and a concluding sentence.]

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JAIR THE APOSTATE

CHAPTER I

THE HIGH PRIEST

TOLA, the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a mighty man amongst the children of Issachar, had gathered together four hundred and two-score men noted for their exceeding great valour; he and all his company were mounted each upon an ass's colt, for they were met together for the purpose of hunting wild asses that ranged the hills of Lebanon in great numbers.

Tola said to his young men, "Take good heed what you do, for it will surely come to pass that if you be carried away by the heat of hunting, and shall trespass upon any of the lands of the Philistines, they will surely gather together an army and smite us so that not one of us shall be left alive; therefore, I command you, if the wild asses

break from the hills and leave the shelter of the cedar trees, follow them not, for if they trespass in the cornfields of the Philistines, our enemies will lay it to our charge that we did it to despite them; for their eyes are always open to see faults in us whether we be guilty of evil or no. Therefore, take heed to my words, and let the wild asses that leave the hills go free lest a worse thing befall you."

The young men murmured against the speech of Tola, for their blood was hot in their veins on account of their youth: but Tola was old in the ways of war, and many wounds had taught him much wisdom, yet he answered them not according to their folly, for he knew that they spoke out of the plenitude of their inexperience, and being a wise man, skilled in councils, he knew that one does not gather ripe grapes on a budding vine.

But a young man, Jair by name, a Gileadite, who had come up from the City of Havoth-jair to take part in the hunting, waxed very wroth, and said to Tola—

"Tell me, I pray thee, what manner of men be these Philistines, that we should crawl upon all-fours like beasts of the field before them; did they

not spring from women even as we did? are they not the fruit of their fathers' loins even as we are? Why then should Israel fear these men?"

And all the young men gave a great shout, for the hot words of the young man Jair sounded sweeter in their ears than the cold words of the older man. Tola looked at Jair and on the youths who had urged their colts forward until they formed a circle around him, and Tola saw that they were good to look upon. They were all picked men of fine stature. Their faces were lean, like the face of a greyhound; the eyes were dark and full of fire; the hooked nose was like the beak of a hawk. They wore no covering upon their heads, and no clothing upon their bodies; but the skin of a leopard or some other wild animal was thrown gracefully over one shoulder, circling their ribs like a plaid; a girdle round the waist completed their apparel. Their arms and legs were beautifully fashioned, and shone in the sunlight like burnished ivory. They were equipped as though they had come out for war as well as for hunting, for each man carried a spear in his hand, a sword and a javelin in his girdle.

Then Tola answered Jair, saying, "Thou and

all these that be with thee are young men, and know not the evil thing that may come upon our people if we give the Philistines cause to come out against us. You cannot slay your thousands with the breath of your mouth, therefore hearken unto my counsels and obey me, I pray thee, for if the Philistines come upon us in all their might they will utterly destroy us, cutting us off root and branch. They will put the old men and the old women, our wives and our little children, to the sword, and they will take our maidens and keep them to sport with them, and the damsels will spend all their days in captivity and will curse us for bringing the evil thing upon them; therefore put a curb upon your anger, for our time has not yet come. Know you not that a wise husbandman never stretches forth his hand to pluck the figs until they are ripe; but the foolish man shaketh the bough whilst the fruit is yet green, and gaineth nothing for his labour?"

And Jair answered Tola, saying, "As the Lord liveth we have bowed our necks too long to these people, it is time we spoke to them with the sword; if we had a man to lead us we would go

out boldly against them, we, and all our brethren, and give them battle."

But Tola was wise in his generation, and said, "The fruit does not fall to the first breeze that bloweth, tarry a while in patience; the figs will be ripe in their season, then even the swine that browse in the shade of the trees shall have enough and to spare, and shall wax fat on that which the husbandman wasteth in his season of plenty. But the hour is not yet; let us therefore attend to the hunting of asses, for which purpose we came forth; and let each man keep his hand before his mouth, for the land is full of spies who will run with swift feet to Agag, the King of the Philistines, whose heart is sore against us. Cursed be the man whose mouth shall bring trouble upon our people, for he who is swift with his mouth is slow with his sword; he who is willing that the blood of others shall be shed for his own advancement will not shed his own blood, or the blood of his sons, not even to save the last remnant of the people."

And the young men hearkened to the wisdom of Tola, the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, and went forth with him to the hunting of the wild

asses ; only Jair, the Gileadite, murmured, for he hated Tola, and had it in his heart to be a ruler and a leader of his people, yet had he done nothing either in council or in battle to fasten the eyes or the hearts of the people upon himself ; yet his heart was hot with envy, and he swore unto his own soul that he would bring shame unto Tola, to make him look as a thing of no account in the eyes of all the children of Israel.

The young men rode behind Tola over the sunny valleys which were washed by the waters of the great river, and they were careful not to disturb the flocks and the herds of the Philistines that were feeding in those pleasant pastures. The young maidens, who were of the children of the Philistines, who were tending the sheep and the kine, looked upon the bare limbs of the hunters as they rode by on their asses' colts, and they flattered the young men with their eyes, and enticed them with the pouting of their lips, for they said one to the other, "We have no such men amongst all our own people as these young men, whose arms and legs are as beautiful as the boughs on the young cedars when the spring winds are singing through the hills." And the

young men would have tarried, but Tola admonished them, saying, "Beautiful are the maidens of Philistia; small are their waists, but not so small as the shaft of a spear in the hands of their kinsfolk; red are their lips as the flowers of the pomegranate tree by our own running waters, but not so red as the blood of a hunter on the sword-point of an angry warrior; swift are the glances they throw you from beneath the down-drooping lids that cover their eyes, but not so swift as the flight of a javelin hurled in hot anger by one of their brethren; soft and white are their breasts which they bare for your tempting, but not so soft as the shroud which covers the limbs of a dead man. Pass by, and give no cause for offence to Agag, their King."

And the young men went on; only Jair, the Gileadite, opened his mouth to scoff at the warnings of Tola, saying to those who rode upon his right hand and his left hand, "Tola our leader is over-cautious, verily he seeth a substance where only shadows abide; to him every tree is an armed Philistine and every blade of grass is a warrior's spear. He urged us not to bask in the smiles of the damsels, because he himself has passed

his youth; winter has come upon him, but with us it is the morning of summer; snow is in the veins of Tola, but our veins are full of wine. Shall we not enjoy our youth in its season?"

Then Tola's wrath was kindled against Jair, and he said to him, "Go now, thou boaster, and do the thing that is in thy heart to do; and if the Philistines smite thee we will not avenge thee, neither will we hold them guilty, for the blood-guiltiness will be upon thine own head. Whatever they do to thee, it shall not concern us, but the matter shall be between thee and our enemies only; therefore leave us now and go to the damsels, if they seem so desirable in thine eyes; but thou shalt not tempt the young men to go with thee to be a buckler for thy foolishness—thine own hand must guard thine own head."

And Jair went not, for the words in his mouth were bigger than the deeds in his heart.

So they rode forward until they came to a great cleft in the hills, and there Tola divided his party, saying, "Let us make a circle from this point, that we may gather in the wild asses even as a fisher gathereth the fish into his net." And

he divided them into companies, ten men in each company, to scour the hills, but he himself abode in the great cleft in the hills, for he said, "Some one must tarry in this place, and the joy of hunting is the birthright of the young."

It was evening when the hunters started to draw their circle, and as they separated they made wagers with each other concerning the hunting, each company wagering against its neighbour.

The moon came out and flooded all the world with its cold beauty, lighting up the great cedar forests with wondrous touches of pale flame, blending shadow and sheen as an artist blends fact with fancy. The wind rustled amidst the boughs. A lion called to his mate from the gorges of the hills, until the leaves upon the trees were vibrant with the deep-toned roaring. A leopard prowling in the shadow of the cedars growled half-hearted defiance to the king of beasts, and slunk away to watch with eyes of flame, from some place of security, the passing of the monarch and his consort.

In an open glade, which lay bared to the moonlight in the very heart of the forest, a group

of wild asses were feeding upon the short sweet grass. Now and again a warning call would go up from one of the dams, as a foal strayed too near the ring of shadows that girdled the lawn-like patch of plain-land, for the old she-asses knew that in those shadows danger always lurked. Even the sentries, posted with almost mathematic regularity around the herd, never ventured too near that ominous circlet of shade where the lion or the leopard could crouch unseen. The sentries did not feed; they stood with ears pricked forward watching the forest, snuffing the night air suspiciously all the time—ears, eyes, and nostrils always on the alert. If a twig broke somewhere in the darkness, they tossed their heads, stamped the ground with their fore-hoofs, swung themselves half round, and stood ready to spring away with the speed of the wind should one of their savage enemies launch himself out of the blackness. If they caught the gleam of yellow eyes glaring hungrily from the bough or bole of a tree, they sent a hoarse, urgent, warning call to the herd, which brought them together instantly; the dams and foals huddling together in the centre, the colts and stallions lining up all

round them—every nerve strained, every sense on the alert. Or if the suspicious nostrils caught the faintest taint upon the pure night air, the warning call went forth; every head went up, every pair of nostrils searched the passing breeze for hostile signs. The great cats might prowl round them through the long watches of the night, using all the wiles that are inherent in feline subtlety; but they seldom broke through the tireless watchfulness of the grey guards. A lion roared on the very edge of the clearing on the upwind side; the sentries galloped, with ears laid back and tails extended, in towards the herd. Some of the foals, frightened out of their senses by that awful sound, tried to break away and gallop down the wind to the forest, but the watchful colts dashed at them, and with heels and teeth drove them back. They knew the lions' tactics, knew that in the shelter of the trees on the opposite side the lioness and her half-grown cubs were waiting for the mad rush of the foals, and behind the lioness—the leopards. The lion crouched like a vast cat, just where a silver ball of moonlight lay upon the earth like a great white eye. The huge beast lashed the ground with its tail; its hind-legs were drawn

in under its quivering belly; its fore-paws were stretched out in front, the great claws, working nervously, cut up the grass-covered ground; the brutish, ugly head rested between the paws, the chin just touching the grass; the unkempt mane, like the mane on the neck of a wild horse, draped both sides of the neck, rising and falling at the bidding of the night wind; two great reddish-brown eyes glared from amidst the misshapen ugliness of the face. At intervals the monster opened its cavernous mouth and belched forth sound, exhaling foul vapours with the horrible noise; and at each fierce outbreak of sound the young asses in the open went wild with terror. But the older animals faced resolutely down the wind, for their instinct told them that where the noise was, the danger was not; they knew that if the lion had meant to strike from that quarter he would have struck suddenly, swiftly, noiselessly, launching himself like a thunderbolt from the unseen.

There was a faint rustling on the grass to the right and left of the great brute, sandalled feet stole over space almost like shadows, the forest king did not even turn to look in the direction of the



1911
Theatrical
Photography

SANDALLED FEET STOLE OVER SPACE LIKE SHADOWS

sound—was he not king, who would dare attack him? He opened his reeking jaws to roar again, and a group of hunters armed with spears and javelins sprang nimbly forward and hurled their weapons at the astonished lord of the forest; half a dozen spears quivered in his flanks; a javelin took him in the throat: he was done to death when he least expected danger, yet the ferocity of his nature prompted the monarch of the hills to die fighting. He did not roar, did not try to slink away to die as a meaner creature would have done; one sweep of his great head, one flash of the red-brown eyes, and he saw the naked limbs of his undoers flitting amongst the trees, then he hurled himself upon the nearest. The jaws closed round the middle of a man, just below the fifth rib; the backbone cracked like a sun-dried reed in the hands of a boy; the hunter gave a long wailing cry which spoke of death in every note; the lion growled once, deeply, dreadfully, then sank slowly, majestically to earth, stretched himself out and died with his dead victim still in his jaws. The white-limbed figures, that had vanished amongst the cedars when the lion had turned in his wrath,

came quietly back; they knew that death had come to their companion swiftly and surely; and as they forced the jaws asunder and tenderly drew the body from the embrace of the yellow fangs, one said to his fellows, "This thing had not happened to our brother if Tola had been here to counsel us, it was the vanity within us that caused us to do this foolish thing; there will be weeping amongst the maidens of Issachar when we return without him, for his feet were lightest in the dance." Jair, the Gileadite, who was amongst the young men, lifted up his voice, and said, "Why do you always call upon the name of Tola? Would Tola have slain the lion single-handed, would he have ventured his life more than another? The thing that has come to pass was ordained from the beginning." And the young men were silent, for they knew not what answer to make to Jair; but their hearts were very heavy as they broke down boughs from the cedar trees and laid them across their spears, and laid the body of the young man across the bier, and carried it to their camp and set a watch about the body; and they mourned for the young man exceedingly. The skin of the lion they

took as a trophy to give to his father upon their return, and that company took no further part in the hunting of the wild asses because of the death of the young man their kinsman.

The day following, all the rest of the hunters, mounted upon fleet colts, pursued the wild asses. Those on the south side drove the herd towards the north, and those on the north drove them back again; those on the east side drove them west, and those on the west pursued them towards the east; and all the time the circle of the hunters grew narrower and narrower, until the wild asses were hemmed in a small ring, and their legs shook under them with very weariness, for the hunters pressing them from all sides gave them no rest, until their spirits were utterly broken and they became as sheep in the hands of drovers and were content to go whithersoever they were bidden. The huntsmen drove them towards the spot where Tola was awaiting them, and on the way, just as it was evening, they came up with Jair and the young men that bore the body of him that was slain by the lion. And when they had come to a narrow cleft between the

two hills, they that were with the dead man elected to go through the narrow passage because it was nearer, but they that were with the wild asses went round another way because of the narrowness of the opening between the hills. And it came about that a great leopard, that scented the body of him that lay asleep on the bier, crouched upon the pathway and made ready to spring upon the bearers; then they turned to flee, all except one of them, who was only a boy, but of exceeding great stature, whose name was Samson, of the family of Danites. Samson stood upright between the leopard and the bier, and called out to Jair, the Gileadite, whose feet were amongst the fastest of those that ran back; and Samson said, "Ho! Jair, where is now thy mouth with which thou didst boast, saying, 'Where is a man to lead us up against the Philistines'?" Then Jair turned back, for he was ashamed. And Samson said, "Lend me, I pray thee, thy spear, that I may slay the beast." And Jair said, "Wherefore should I lend thee my spear?" Samson replied, saying, "Because I have nothing in my hand wherewith to slay this fierce beast." And Jair said, "If thou wilt promise me two

spears of the best that is in thy father's house when we return, then will I lend thee my spear." And Samson promised him according to the words of his mouth, and Samson moved out alone to attack the beast. When the leopard saw him, it sprang upon Samson; but the boy caught it on the end of his spear and tossed it into a great hole that lay by the side of the mountain; then he broke the spear that had been Jair's across his knee, and threw the pieces down the side of the mountain on to the carcass of the leopard. And Jair's anger was kindled against the boy, and he said, "What is this that thou hast done with the spear that I lent thee?" And Samson answered him, saying, "When I was in danger of my life I asked thee for thy spear, and you would not; and when I pressed thee, didst thou not make me promise to return it to thee twofold, taking usury of one of thy fellows in his extremity? Therefore, I say thou art no more to be counted amongst warriors and hunters; thou and thy seed shall be usurers, taking back with two hands what thou gavest with one; men shall despise thee and thy seed because of thy doings this day." And Jair was

wroth with Samson, and would have cast his javelin at him but that he feared the anger of his companions, for the boy was well beloved on account of his great courage and the strength that was manifest in him.

That night, when all the rest slept in their camp, Jair rose up and passed down to the dwellings of the Philistines and made merry with them, and with the damsels who had been herding the flocks in the valley, and he boasted to them that it was he who had slain the lion and the great leopard with his own hand; and the people believed his words, counting him a great hunter, and they did him much honour. When he saw that he had won their hearts, he told them that Tola had spoken evilly of them to his hunters. And the Philistines were filled with anger, and swore amongst themselves that they would slay Tola on the morrow. So Jair said to them, "Swear now to me that you will not tell Tola or his people that it was I who told you concerning this thing." And the Philistines said, "How then shall we accuse these people if we have no witnesses?" And Jair replied, "Couldst thou not say that your god

Dagon revealed the matter to you in a dream? And if they say the thing is not true, will it not count as an insult unto Dagon, your god?" And the Philistines agreed to the saying of Jair, because it was in their hearts to do evil to Israel; and they swore unto Jair that they would not betray him to his countrymen. Jair, who was cautious in all things, took fifty changes of raiment from the Philistines as a pledge that they would not break faith with him, for he counted riches higher than any gift from God; then he rose up and got upon his ass's back and rode into his own camp, and no one knew that he had been away. When Tola saw the fifty changes of raiment, he said to Jair, in the presence of all the company, "What wealth is this, and how did it fall into thy hands?" And Jair replied, saying, "I was astray whilst you all slept, and I rode a little way down the valley, and lo, a party of Philistines met me, and they asked me whence I came and whose party I belonged to, and I answered them civilly, as thou didst command us, saying, I am of a party of Israelites under Tola, the son of Dodo, and we have been hunting wild asses in the hills

of Lebanon. Then they laughed at me, and made a mock of thy name, and one of their number, a man of great stature, drew his sword and would have cut me from my ass's back, but I thrust him through with my spear, and took his sword from his hand and fell upon his company with it, and they ran from before me; then I took from the caravans the wealth that now you see me with and fled back, because I saw those that had fled coming back with a great company to slay me." The young men who were with Tola gave a great shout of joy, and they made a song, and cried, "Who is greater than Jair? Samson has slain his leopard, but Jair has slain a champion of our enemies the Philistines." And they danced before Jair, and did him honour. But Tola and Samson did not join in the festivities. So Jair said to Samson, "Art thou indeed jealous of me, Samson?" But Samson said, "I am not jealous of thee, Jair, but I am vexed on account of this riddle." The hunters crowded round Samson, crying, "Explain thy riddle that we may read it for thee." Samson said, "Nay, thou couldst not read my riddle, only Jair, the Gileadite, can make it plain to

me. Wilt thou read my riddle for me, Jair?" Jair replied, "Art thou laughing at me, boy? Go forth and slay Philistines thyself, and then return to make a mock of others." But Samson said only, "Wilt thou read my riddle, Jair?" And Jair cried, "Thou art a better talker than a fighter, Samson; let me hear thy riddle and I will answer it if there be a reason in it." Then said Samson, "Yesterday, after I had slain the leopard, I broke thy spear across the middle and threw it down the mountain-side, how came it, then, that thou hadst a spear in thy hand when the Philistines came upon thee, seeing that no spear has gone from amongst us?" And Jair could not answer Samson, but spat upon the ground and cursed him. And the young men sided with Jair because of the spoil which he had; but Tola sided with Samson, saying, "We have not yet heard the end of this matter, for the water is muddy and no man can see the bottom of the pool; by and by, when the water hath grown settled, many things which are now hidden shall be made plain. As for this Gileadite, he is a great slayer of men with his tongue, but when the hour of his

reckoning cometh he will be found wanting; as for thee, Samson, thou wilt turn the scales at the full weight."

At noon the same day there came up a great company of the Philistines, armed as for battle, and they cried upon the name of Tola, saying, "Come out and fight with us, since thou hast said so much that is evil concerning us." And Tola asked them, "What evil have I done thee that thou shouldst seek after my life and the lives of these young men? Surely some enemy has told thee a lie concerning me." But the Philistines cried, "It is no lie that we have heard, for our god Dagon hath told us that thou art our enemy." Then Samson spoke, saying, "Let me put forth a riddle, and if ye answer it ye shall slay me and take all that is mine, but if ye answer it not ye shall let us go in peace." And the Philistines, seeing that Samson was but a boy in years, considered that they could easily overcome his wisdom, so they agreed. So Samson asked them, saying, "Does your god Dagon understand Hebrew?" And they shouted that Dagon was a god of Philistia and understood no other tongue. Then said Samson, "How could

Dagon have overheard Tola speaking evil of thee, since Tola speaks no language but Hebrew? Are ye sure it was Dagon who gave you the tidings ye speak of? Might it not have been an Hebrew who hated Tola?" And the Philistines saw that the boy had set a trap for them with his mouth, and would not answer him, because they were the stronger, for they outnumbered Tola and his company five to one, so they drew off to make ready for battle. And it came to pass that whilst they were making ready for this strife that an old man riding upon an ass came upon them from the valley below, and he was an Israelite, and the Philistines said to the old man, "Turn thou thy ass's head and go back the way thou camest, lest evil happen unto thee." And the old man said, "Why should I return empty-handed whence I came? What evil can befall me? Let me pass, I pray thee, for I would fain go to my son who is with Tola, the son of Dodo, who is in the hills of Lebanon hunting." And the Philistines asked him, saying, "What is thy name and thy son's name?" And the old man answered, "My name is Manoah, I am of the priesthood of Israel, and my son's name

is Samson." The chief of the Philistines asked Manoah, "How old is thy son?" And Manoah replied, "He is but a boy in years, but of great stature and exceeding beautiful; he is our only son, and his mother's heart is heavy because he is away from us; she hath sent me to Tola, saying, 'Send the boy back as if he were sent upon an errand, that I may see him, for I am old, and my eyes weary for the sight of my son; but keep the thing secret from the stripling lest he be ashamed and refuse to come, for he counteth himself a man already on account of his great strength, for already is he half a head taller than the tallest man in all Israel.'" Then the leader of the Philistines said, "Hath thy son lovely hair like the hair of a woman?" And Manoah replied, "That is my son; he is a Nazarite. No razor hath been upon his head from his birth, the curls on his head are the colour of gold that hath been beaten by the artificers, and it falleth around his neck as water falleth over the edge of a rock in the sunlight; the maidens of our people love to twine flowers in the midst of his curls, for he is good to look upon. Why do ye ask me concerning these things? hath the young lad dis-

pleased you? If so, I pray you remember he is but young, and ye are all men who have reached the noon of life, and be warriors, as I can plainly see by your bearing." The speech of Manoah pleased the Philistines, and they told him of the things which had taken place, keeping back only that part concerning the visit of Jair to their camp, and this they did because of the oath they had sworn unto the Gileadite. Then Manoah cried, "Let me go, I pray you, that I may set this matter right between you and my people." And the Philistines said unto him, "Go, but the life of Tola we will surely have, because we have sworn it by our god Dagon."

When Manoah had come to the camp of the Israelites he found the young men preparing for battle, and his son, his only son, Samson, was chief amongst the toilers, casting great rocks one on top of another to make a rampart behind which they could hide whilst fighting, because their numbers were small and the host of their enemies very large. Manoah was full of hot anger, and he cried out, "Tola, what is this that thou hast done to the Philistines? Did we entrust our young men to thee

that thou shouldst cause their enemies to fall upon them and slay them?" and Manoah cursed Tola. Then Tola spoke what was in his mind, saying, "I have done no evil to these people, neither have I opened my mouth to hurt them; they do but seek a cause whereby they may undo us. But their dead shall lie upon the ground like leaves in the forest before the fighting is over, and it may be that after that they will no longer be eager to seek a cause against our people." But Manoah would not hearken to Tola because of his son, his only son, Samson, and he cried out against Tola, saying, "It is thy life, Tola, son of Dodo, that the Philistines require, not the lives of these young men." Then Tola, leaning upon his spear, said, "Am I a boy that I should fear death? Have I not walked in the battle with death all around me, and do not the scars of my wounds speak for me?" Then he rent the leopard's skin from his body and bared his chest to show his wounds, saying, "Look at me, Manoah; are not all my wounds in front of my body? Why, then, shouldst thou think that I feared death? Go back to the Philistines, and say that Tola, the

son of Dodo, will come forth single-handed and fight with their champion; and if one be slain by Tola let them send a second, and a third, until death come to me."

The young men of Israel that stood by hung their heads and were silent; only Jair the Gileadite spoke, and he cried, "It is good, let Tola be our champion against these boasters, that Israel be not ashamed." But Samson said, "Why should this thing be? What hath Tola done that we should forsake him? If any harm hath been done the Philistines it hath been done by this Gileadite who hath vaunted of the number he hath killed. Let him go forth to the battle, and let us see if his arm be as strong as his mouth." But Jair said he would not put so great a shame upon Tola, for Tola was their leader and a man of war from his youth up; whereas he, Jair, was but a young man and of no account. So Tola rode out and defied all the hosts of the Philistines; and the Philistines sent a champion to meet Tola, and they fought with swords; and Tola wounded his adversary so that he fell and could not rise to his feet; and the Philistine said to Tola, "If thou wilt spare my

life I will tell thee a thing." And Tola replied, "Speak, and I will spare thy life." Then the Philistine said, "It was not our god Dagon who told us concerning this, but one of thine own company—Jair, the Gileadite." Then Tola said, "Is that all that thou hast to tell me? If thy life is not worth more than thy tidings it is of small account." The Philistine answered, "It is not all; whilst I did fight with thee a great number of our people were to march round the hills and come upon thy people unawares from behind, and put them all to the sword, sparing none but the man Jair and the old man Manoah and his son Samson." Then Tola ran back towards Israel. And when Jair saw him coming with his bloody sword in his hand he was afraid, and slipped away into the cedar forest and hid there to wait and see what might happen.

When Tola came to his people he told them what the Philistine had told him, and Manoah said, "Let my son Samson take an hundred men and fall back amongst the cedars and lie in wait in the narrow gorges; when the Philistines come, let him fall upon them suddenly and slay them, putting every man to the sword; when they rush

to the attack let them raise a loud shout, and we too will make a great noise, so that the Philistines will think they have fallen into the hands of a host." And Tola saw that the plan was good, and he consented to it. Then Manoah told Samson to cut down boughs from the cedar trees, a bough for each man; and he commanded the young men to carry the boughs in front of them, so that the Philistines could not tell the men from the trees until they were too close to avoid falling into the snare. Then Tola said, "How comes it that thou, who hast been a man of peace all your days, hath so much subtlety in the things pertaining to war? Verily the Philistines will walk into the snare as birds into the snares of the fowler." And Manoah replied, "It is but a little matter. Surely a man need not give all his days to fighting to know how to fight when the need ariseth? Even a wild beast can fight when his talons are full grown, and who teaches the wild beast? If a man's cause is good, knowledge will surely come to him in his extremity. Put now thy young men behind rocks on the hillside, on the higher side of the hill, and let them cast their javelins from behind the shelter of the rocks and

thrust with the spear and smite with the sword when the enemy is spent with climbing upwards. Thus do, and one man shall be as good as five; for he that assaulteth a position must fall to the sword of him that holdeth it, if the heart of the besieged fail not. Take likewise an hundred slingers of stones, for all thy young men can use the sling; let them wait on the upper edge of the hill behind the spearmen who guard the slope of the hill, that they may cast stones into the midst of the Philistines as they advance to attack them. Let each man choose twenty pebbles, round and smooth, and carry them in his scrip; and pick each one his man before he casts his stone, choosing the leaders of the host of the Philistines and the bravest who rush on to the battle, leaving those that lag behind until the last; and it may come about that we shall gain the victory, for the steepness of the hills shall fight for us. But if it come to pass that the enemy overcome thee at the ramparts, then thou shalt not abide there to fight, on account of the numbers that are against thee, but every man shall flee into the woods and carry on the battle amongst the cedars. And when the Philistines pursue, thinking the battle

won, they will be scattered in the midst of the trees; then shalt thou turn upon them, each man fighting for his own hand as shall seem good unto him; and the Philistines shall remember this day, when they have forgotten the names of their cities, and the name of their god Dagon, for it shall be written upon their memories in letters of living blood. Go now, and fight valiantly under the eye of Tola; but as for me, I will remain upon the uppermost height afar off and pray to the God of Israel, the God of battles, to give thee the victory."

CHAPTER II

THE BATTLE OF THE CEDARS

SAMSON, the son of Manoah, with his company of an hundred men, walked swiftly through the forests, for they were all men who had followed the craft of the hunter from childhood, and there was nothing in the wilderness of trees that was hid from them. A leaf could not fall from a bough but some of them noted its fall. They knew the song and the call of every bird and the manners of every beast, and the twilight of the forest was no hindrance to them. When they had reached a spot which seemed good for his purpose, Samson said to his followers, "Do now as my father commanded us, break down each man a bough that is in full leaf, and let each man carry his bough in front of him." And the young men did as they were commanded; but Samson put his arms round the

trunk of a young cedar and tore it from the ground and carried it in front of him. And the young men marvelled at the strength of Samson, and said each to his fellow, "Whence comes all this great strength to Samson? We have full-grown men in Israel who are giants, but not one of them could do so with a young cedar." Then Samson chose ten of the fleetest men in his company, and sent them forward as skirmishers to look for the Philistines; and he charged them, saying, "When you come upon the Philistines ye shall howl as a she-wolf howls, that we may know which way to look for them; and when ye have howled twice, as a she-wolf howls, then put your life into your feet and run back swiftly and bring us your tidings. Then we will choose a spot to lay in wait for them, so that we may go into the battle fresh and strong like young colts; but they will be weary with swift marching, and the surprise which they had prepared for us will fall upon their own heads." So Samson's men rested in the shade whilst his spies went to seek the enemy. But Samson rested not; he rent a great bough from a tree and stripped the smaller boughs from it; and he tore up a huge fragment of rock

which had a sharp edge on one side, and he drove the rock into a cleft in the end of the bough and made him a club; and so great was the club that not one of his men could hold it at arm's-length with two hands. But Samson whirled it round his head with his one hand as if it had been a javelin; and he said, "I will not have to smite twice with this at any Philistine." Then he undid his hair, which was knotted on the top of his head, and let it fall in tangled masses of yellow curls about his neck and shoulders, but on his chin there was no beard, for he was yet very young. Then he stripped himself naked as the day he was born, excepting for the girdle about his loins. And he looked exceedingly beautiful, and his men said, "Ho! Samson, when the Philistines see thee they will think thou art a spirit of the woods of Lebanon." Then Samson replied, "He that feeleth my club across his loins will not think me a spirit."

When the spies returned, they told Samson that their enemies were advancing along the dry bed of an ancient river that ran through the forest. When Samson heard this, he cried, "Our enemies are delivered into our hand, we will surely



THRUSTING WITH THEIR SPEARS AND HEWING WITH THEIR SWORDS

smite them most grievously; rise up and make ready for them." So they went. And Samson placed fifty of his men on one side of the river, hid amidst the trees, and fifty on the other side, and each man held his branch in front of him so that no man could tell the men from the trees which surrounded them. And when the Philistines came abreast of the spot, then Samson howled like a wolf, and rushed down the bank into the midst of the men of Philistia. And all the men of Israel set up a great shout, and they, too, rushed upon their enemies with an exceeding great fury, thrusting with their spears and hewing with their swords; only Samson had neither sword nor spear, but smote with his great club; and whenever he smote, a man fell and did not rise again. And he was very terrible. His hair streamed behind him like the mane of a war-horse when it rusheth to the battle; his bare limbs shone in the sunlight as his club rose and fell and circled around him. One of his enemies had cast a spear at him, wounding him in the forehead, and the blood streamed down his cheeks and fell in a red stream upon his chest; yet he paused not, but pushed into the press of the battle, smiting on the

right hand and upon the left, and the path which he cleft for himself was marked with the bodies of dead men. The number of the Philistines was very great. But their number only proved a hindrance to them, seeing that they were crowded in between the two banks of the river, so that those that were in the middle could not help those who were upon the outside edges; those who were wounded and fell were trampled to death by their fellows. Then the leaders of the Philistines called aloud upon the god Dagon to help them; but Samson cried, "Dagon sleepeth, he will not hear thee." And he took that Philistine in his hands and bent his loins across his knee so that his backbone came through the flesh, and he died in the hands of Samson; and his host fled, for they were stricken with fear, because they believed that Samson was not a man but a spirit; and they shouted, "He is not a man, he is a god; who can fight against him?" So Samson and his men that were left gathered up those that had wounds amongst their comrades, and they buried those that had fallen by the spear of the Philistines; and when he numbered his men he found that one out of every three had been killed, and one

out of two had been wounded. Those that were left gathered in all the spoil, and divided it into heaps, a portion being reserved for the household of those who were slain.

And it came about that whilst Samson and the young men who were with him were engaged in battle in the bed of the river, that the leader of the host of Philistines attacked Tola and his men. They rushed up the slope of the hill, thinking to cause the hearts of the Israelites to melt within them because of their number, and as they came they shouted their battle-songs, and stamped upon the ground, so that the ground shook; and the noise of their feet was as the noise of the sea on the rocks of the coast, but the Hebrews were not afraid. The men behind the ramparts lay still with their spears pointing outwards and their swords ready to their hands, whilst the slingers stood behind them high up the hill awaiting the word of Tola to loose their slings upon the advancing host; but Tola would not give the order whilst the men were yet afar off. When the enemy were within an hundred paces of the ramparts, a young man cried, "Ho! Tola, art thou blind? Canst thou not see our enemies

advancing like the waters of a great river to overwhelm us?" And Tola answered him, crying, "I am not blind; tarry awhile in patience until they are come within ten paces, and then slay all their leaders; and when the confusion is great upon them I and those who be with me will leap forth and smite them with the sword." But the slingers would not wait, for they were young men unaccustomed to battle, and they saw not the wisdom of Tola, the man of many battles, so they commenced to sling pebbles into the advancing host, and killed many of them; but their leaders they did not kill, because, when the Philistines saw their men falling they covered their leaders with shields so that they were not slain. When the Philistines had arrived at the rampart they tried to rush over it, but Tola and his spearmen stood steady, and waited for them; and they could not break through, and many were slain. Then they ran back down the hill, and the slingers cast stones upon them as they fled until their scrips were empty and there were not more stones on the hillside fit to sling. The only pebbles fit for the slingers were in a little brook that ran past the foot of the hill, and they could not go to that

because of the Philistines. Then Tola was wroth with those men, saying to them, "Why did you cast all your pebbles amongst the common men? Why did ye not wait, as I commanded you? If ye had killed all their leaders who would now be able to gather them again to attack us? You have done foolishly, and have made all my plans of no account."

The slingers broke off pieces of rock to use in their slings, but the rock was of no avail because it would not go straight when they cast it; and the enemy gathered their courage in their hands and came again; and when Tola and his spearmen stood up to check them from overbearing the barriers, then the leaders of the advancing host commanded his men to stand back out of reach of the spears and cast javelins into the ranks of the Israelites; and they did so.

Then Tola cried with a loud voice, "Fly every man to the woods!" And the young men ran, and wasted no time as they ran, but the slingers who had to run round the hill into the woods fell into the hands of the Philistines, and every man of them was slain by the sword. The Philistines made merry, because they counted the battle won;

and each man ran into the woods to slay the Hebrews. But the Hebrews, acting as Tola had commanded them, hid themselves amidst the trees where the cedars grew close together, and it was dark there, because the boughs made a roof between the earth and sky. When the Philistines rushed in like hounds that are hunting they shouted one to the other, making sport of the thing they did; but the Hebrews held their peace and smote surely and quietly. Kneeling by the roots of trees they thrust the spear into the bowels of an enemy as he rushed in shouting, or smote deftly and noiselessly with the sword across the neck of one who passed; but the Philistines slew only a few of the Hebrews.

And it came about that Samson, when he had rested with his company on the banks of the dry water-course, took counsel with them concerning what they should do. When they had all spoken, Samson said, "Was it not the plan of our enemies to come upon us in the rear and smite us? why then should we not borrow a plan from them? Let us march swiftly, seeing that we know the ways of the forest, let us get behind the camp of the Philistines, and it may happen that they will

consider that an army has arrived to help us, and fear fall upon them, and, if so, then they will surely fly, for fear always gets into the feet of a man when he is afraid; then we and our brethren will do by them as they would do by us."

Then one said, "Thy plan, Samson, is a good plan, and hath wisdom and subtlety in it, but we be but a little band of men." And Samson answered, "I am only a boy in years, but I have learned that a little band that is strong in courage, and well armed with weapons of war, knowing the thing it means to accomplish, and determined to do that thing or die making the effort, is greater than a host that is not moved by one single purpose; you may abide each man where he will, but, as for me, I will do the thing I have spoken, if I go alone to do it."

Then the doubters were filled with shame, and they said, "Thou shalt not go alone, Samson, we will go with thee; but what shall be done with our wounded men?" And Samson said, "Let the wounded lie by the spoil. If we win the battle we will surely come for them and the ripe fruit of our swords; but if we do not come then they will know that we have been gathered to our fathers,

and it will be better for each man to thrust himself through with a sword than that our enemies find them beside the spoil taken from their dead."

So Samson left his wounded and the spoil, and passing through the forest they came upon the camp of the Philistines from behind, and there was no man in the camp, for the host of the Philistines was in the forest hunting the Hebrews.

Manoah came down from the hill when he saw Samson, and Manoah told his son all that had come to pass, and Samson asked his father, saying, "What shall I do now? Guide me, I pray thee, for I am but young." And Manoah said, "This is the thing thou shalt do now, my son; set fire to all that is here and then raise a great shout." And Samson and his company set fire to the camp and made a great blaze, then they shouted with a great shout, and the noise of their voices reached the ears of their enemies, so that they turned to look towards their camp. And when they saw the fire they were afraid, for they thought that an army had come up against them from behind, and they fled; but the Hebrews under Tola encompassed them, for the Hebrews

knew the ways of the woods, and they put every man they could come upon to the edge of the sword, and they stayed not their hands from the slaughter until the moon rode high in the heavens ; then they fell down from sheer weariness and slept in the grass with their bloody swords in their hands, and many of them died from their wounds and exposure before morning. When it was day, Tola called them together and numbered them, and found that of the four hundred and four-score hunters who had gone out to the battle with him, only an hundred and twelve remained, the rest had fallen by the hands of their foes. But it had come about as Tola, the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, had foretold, for the dead of the Philistines lay thick as leaves of the forest on the ground ; and Tola decided to call the battle of that day the Battle of the Cedars, because of the last stand made by the Hebrews amongst the cedar trees.

As soon as he was able to move his little band, Tola decided to put as much of the country as possible between himself and the enemy, for he knew well that they would not remain satisfied with the result of the Battle of Cedars, and he was too old in experience to wish to risk the lives of

his few followers in a contest out of which no good could come either to him or his band.

It was a custom with Hebrews when out hunting to carry with them nets made of plaited sinews; these nets were usually used for carrying home the choicer portions of the spoil of the chase. When Tola had decided to move his little band, he commanded them to take the plaited bags, and rip them open, joining two together; these were fixed between two asses, and on each a wounded man was laid, with great care, everything being done by those who were sound to make the hurt men ride easily.

When the stars were out, Tola put his men in marching order and gave the signal to advance; for it was his intention to steer his course by the stars through the wooded country until he could reach the Hebrew borders. Tola did not leave the ordering of the march to any man, not even to Samson or Manoah, for he was a wise and prudent soldier, who trusted as little as possible to the chance of war; believing always that one eye in a man's own head was worth twenty eyes in the heads of underlings.

He first sent Samson with a few picked men to

move warily in advance, telling him to spread his men out like a fan, to cover as much ground as possible with his small force. Other men were sent to march parallel on the right hand and on the left with his main body. A small company of chosen ones he kept behind him to prevent the enemy from taking him at a disadvantage.

All his wounded were placed in the middle of his fighting force, at the head of which he himself rode; and in that order Tola took his stricken company in safety out of the land of Philistia.

As soon as the Hebrews knew of the manner in which the Philistines had attacked the hunting-party, there was an outcry for vengeance, although up to that time the Hebrews had mostly suffered defeat at the hands of the Philistines whenever they met in regular battle, for Agag, the King of Philistia, was a wise and skilful soldier, and, moreover, he had purchased from the King of Assyria great numbers of iron war-chariots, of which the Israelites had none.

The news soon spread to the ears of Agag that the Hebrews were mustering in their strength, under the command of Abdon, the son of Hillel the Pirathonite; so Agag called his

captains together, and all the lords who were fighting-men, and they held a council of war, and the 'lords laughed at the gathering of the Israelites, saying, "They will not fight with us; they only meet to talk, so that their women may think they are brave men; they are only boasters, their bellies are filled with the east wind." But Agag was wiser than his councillors. When they laughed, he said, "Laughter is easily made, and costs nothing in the market-place; if you have nothing better than laughter to offer me, go home again to your women, and I will choose my councillors from the common people. I know but two fools who follow war—the first under-valueth his enemy always, and so courteth defeat; the second over-rateth his foe, and is too wary in all that he doth, holding his hand when he should strike, and so being forced to strike when it would be wiser to hold his hand: of two such fools I know not which is the greater, but both are bad." So Agag prepared for the battle which his wisdom told him was sure to come. His iron chariots, which he had hitherto never used in war, he caused to be handled by the fighting-men daily; the horses which had to draw them were carefully examined

to see if any amongst them were unfit for service, and fresh animals were trained to be ready for use in case any of them were hurt or killed in the early part of the struggle. Four horses were attached to each chariot, two and two abreast; a man armed with a light spear rode astride each of the leading horses and guided it into the battle. On the front of the chariot a driver stood with a whip; the handle of the whip was short, being about half the length of a man's arm, but the lash, which was of green hide cut from the backs of the great sea-horses which the hunters found in the rivers of fresh water beyond the great desert, were exceeding long and heavy. To use one of those whips a man had to have long and careful training, but a skilled driver could split the hide of a horse with every stroke, and drive the creatures to madness if he so desired. On the left hand of the driver, on the front of the car, two men stood; one carried a bow and a sheaf of arrows, he standing always next to the driver; the other, who stood on the outer edge of the front of the car, carried a long pole, at the end of which was a curved sword, with which he mowed down all who came within his reach. This man

wore armour, so that neither javelin nor stone cast by the slingers could slay him, and he was fastened to the car by a chain, which was riveted to an iron belt that passed around his body at the loins. This was done so that the man might not lose his balance and fall off when striking at foes whilst the chariots were in full flight. In the car there were three spearmen, and three bowmen on each side. At the back of the car, in the centre of the back, stood one man armed only with an axe, and these men were skilled either with the left or the right hand, so that whilst he lived none might hope to leap into the body of the car from behind without being slain.

Besides these iron chariots, Agag had a splendid army of men on horseback, whose duty it was to wait until the chariots had broken the battle-array of the enemy, and then dash in and stab with their short, heavy-hafted spears.

Of men on foot he had great numbers, but his hope was in his chariots and horsemen. Having prepared his host, he marched forward with great speed, and placed his men upon the brow and slope of a long line of low hills which faced a plain.

On the other side of the plain the Israelites were encamped, at their back was a forest, on their right hand the overflowing water from the river made the ground soft and uncertain, in front of them the plain lay like a beautiful meadow.

When Agag saw the forest behind the Hebrew army he was downcast, for he said to his captains, "If our enemies elect to fight in the shelter of those trees we are undone, for our horses and our chariots are useless there; but if I can tempt this man to come out and give us battle on the plain, it will not be well with him by the time the sun goes down."

So Agag sent some of his craftiest captains with footmen and horsemen to attack the Hebrew army, saying to them, "Make a bold front at first, but, when the battle grows hot, then fall back as though dismayed; then if the leader of the host of Israel is a wise man, he will be content and stand patiently to see what we shall do next; but if he is a vain fellow and a fool he will pursue after you, leaving his vantage ground, then I will show you how to act."

The captains did as they had been commanded,

pressing valiantly in upon the Hebrews, who stood firmly awaiting them.

The Hebrew slingers, many of whom boasted that they could split a hair as far as they could cast a stone, stood in beautiful array, and cast their stones with such deadly effect that the plain was soon strewn with the bodies of men, who fell in long lines and lay where they fell. Again and again the Philistines rushed forward and were beaten back; the battle was all in favour of the Hebrew army, and a wild shout of triumph went up from the men of Israel when, after a desperate rush, the Philistines rolled sullenly back towards their own position.

This was the moment for which Agag the King had waited. Standing apart from all men he watched the battle with unbending brows, until, as his army fell back, he saw that Abdon, the son of Hillel the Pirathonite, had given the word of command to his host to push home the victory.

“Now, thou art mine, Abdon, thou and thy men,” cried Agag in an ecstasy of joy. “Let me give thee a lesson in war, thou fool.” Waiting until the Hebrew army had advanced far out upon the plain, King Agag sent a swift rider to

his great body of mounted men, who had been kept out of the battle, bidding them circle round the outermost edges of the advancing Hebrew army; not to give them battle, but to pass behind them and take possession of the woods forsaken by the too-sanguine Israelites. Like eagles circling round a wounded bull, the swift horsemen dashed off upon their errand. Sweeping round the edges of the advancing host, they rode at headlong speed and took up their position in the rear.

Israel saw the danger then, saw the trap that had been laid for them. Before they could recover from the panic which ran through their ranks, the iron chariots on the hills in front of them darted down the slope; the men upon the leaders plied their goads; the drivers whirled the green-hide whips and shrieked commands to the high-mettled steeds; the whips fell, blood gushed from under the lash, mingling with hair and hide. The frantic steeds bit at each other in mad frenzy, squealing through foam-flecked jaws in savage madness. The warriors in the cars brandished their weapons in the sunlight, shouting their battle cries. The whirl of the heavy wheels,

the thunder of the hoofs, the rattle of iron and brass—all filled the air. On swept the cars at lightning speed, and in their wake, crouching over their horses' withers, rode the light horsemen of Agag the King, ready to dash into any gap the chariots made. The Philistines who had been flying in front of the Hebrews opened their ranks like magic, and let the iron storm pass through.

The Hebrews saw the avalanche of iron and horses sweeping down upon them, and, like brave men, braced themselves for the shock which they could not avoid. The slingers made their slings whir round their heads, the smooth round pebbles flew with deadly swiftness and certainty. Many a rider tossed his hands upwards and slid to earth, to be crushed by the chariot wheels; many an archer, many a spearman standing in the chariots, stiffened and fell. Tola, who stood with the slingers a spear's-length in front of the line, shouted to his men to aim at the horses and let the soldiers alone; but the warning came too late, the charge of the chariots had been too sudden, too unexpected, for concerted action on the part of the slingers. Now and again a horse

in the leading pair attached to a chariot would be smitten between the eyes with a stone, which, breaking through the frontal bone, sank deep into the brain. The horse, smitten in full career, would bound convulsively forward with eyes bulging from the sockets, then fall with head and neck doubled between the fore-legs. When one of the leaders fell, the other came down with a crash; the two half-mad brutes behind them, braced to the car, would not have time to swerve, but, forced onward by the momentum of their own wild gallop and the weight of the car, would leap headlong on the top of the fallen leaders and come crashing to earth with the overturned car on top of them. Men and horses would be mixed up in a struggling mass, the brutes kicking in their rage and terror with all the force that was in them, the men stabbing with their spears in the vain hope of quieting those flying hoofs before the life was kicked out of them. At such times it was not good to be one of those chained to the forefront of the car. But those who fell were avenged by those who reached the Hebrew ranks unhurt. Vainly the spearmen of Israel, leaning forward with legs braced for the shock,

tried to stay the rush of the chariots; the arrows from the bowmen flew like hail on a winter's morning, and at that short distance every twang of a bow-string was a chant of death for some Hebrew spearman. The horses crashed in amongst the closely welded masses of men; the warriors with scythes mowed down the soldiers of Israel as harvest hands mow down the ready grain; heads and arms were lopped off at each rhythmic sweep of the curving steel; the axemen smote to the right hand and the left; the massive wheels crushed all they struck, or hurled them, bleeding, to one side, leaving a lane into which the horsemen swooped with lightning speed.

When once the front of the Hebrew battle was broken, when once the cavalry got amongst the shattered ranks of the infantry, the earth drank blood. Some of the Hebrews rushed wildly back in mad disarray towards the woods, only to meet the enemy who had out-manceuvred them; no pity was asked or offered; war was a widow-making pastime in the days of Agag the King.

When Abdon, the son of Hillel the Pirathonite, saw that he had blundered, and that his army

was being cut to pieces, his heart failed him, so that he cried to one who stood near him, to pass his sword through his body, but the man would not. "Get thee to the forefront of the battle and die like a king, striking at thine enemies. I will not slay thee, unless I see thee craving mercy at the hands of these dogs—then, as God liveth, I will give thee a dog's death." And he who so spake was Samson, whose arms were crimson with slaying. So the King pressed to the forefront of the battle, where the slaughter was greatest, and his nine sons made a ring around him, falling one by one face forward to the enemy. And the King also died, with many of his bravest, yet they did not die unavenged, for the circle of slain around them was very great.

After he had spoken to the King, Samson sought Tola in the press of the battle, and found him fighting steadily and warily. The young man said to the veteran, "It is possible for thee to save a remnant of our army even now. Me they will not obey, for I am young, but they will follow thee because they know thee."

Tola said, "Speak, Samson, and be brief." So

the young warrior spoke. "We cannot fall back, Tola, because Agag's men are behind us, but if we fall away to the right hand towards the river, where the ground is soft, our footmen will be more than a match for Agag's horsemen and his chariots, for they will be helpless in the mire." Tola cried, "O grey head on green shoulders, if I can steady even a portion of our army we may yet turn defeat into victory. Come with me, we will try this venture side by side." Then he shouted his battle-cry, and Samson also shouted, so that many who were fleeing stopped and rallied to his side. They flocked around his banner, and like a wedge of steel they cut their way towards the river; and the army, that had straggled hither and thither like sheep knowing not where to go, seeing a body of men moving with fixed purpose steadily towards the river, flocked after them, fighting furiously.

Agag's captains knew not of the marshy ground, though they knew of the river, so they shouted one to the other, "On, on! let us drive these pigs into the water." So, charging recklessly, counting the battle already won, they

suddenly found themselves floundering in the yielding earth; their horses sank almost to their bellies, and were helpless. As for the chariots, they buried their wheels so deep in the mire that no good thing could be done with them. Then it was that Tola called upon his men to stand firm; and the Hebrews, seeing that a man fit to lead them had arisen, gathered fresh heart for the fight. The slingers opened their ranks, so that each man could use his weapon freely, and sent vengeance into the ranks of the struggling mass in front of them; the light-footed spearmen ran forward nimbly, and, passing between the horsemen, they slew without mercy or pity. When a Philistine fell they put their feet upon his neck and trampled his head in soft mud.

The whole army of Philistia, wishing to partake of the slaughter of the Israelites, had pushed into the bog before Agag the King saw the danger. Sending his footmen forward with all speed, with a command to get between the horsemen and the Hebrews, he tried to withdraw his chariots and cavalry, but when night fell he had saved but a few. So, when the two armies separated,

neither had any great stomach for further fighting.

The next day Agag the King sent a message to Tola, saying, "If thou art indeed a warrior and knowest anything concerning the ways of war, come forth and prove it." But Tola laughed at the messenger, saying, "Go, tell Agag the King that I know enough of the art of war for my present needs; if he thinks differently let him prove his thoughts by making me come forth." So the two armies looked at each other for the space of three days; then Agag withdrew to his own country, and Tola bade Israel return to their tents. The people went gladly, for though they had not destroyed the power of Philistia, yet they had proven in open war that the Hebrews were not to be despised. When they chanted the praises of Tola, he, being above all things a just man, gave to Samson the praise that was his due, saying, "This is indeed a grey head on green shoulders; if there were no women in the world, he would save Israel."

CHAPTER III

THE WOMAN OF TIMNATH

AFTER the Battle of the Cedars there was peace for a season between the men of Israel and the people of Philistia, for the Hebrews were not strong enough to completely overthrow the kingdom of Agag, and the children of Philistia had learned to respect the valour of the Hebrews; so there was peace, and the people bartered with each other as of old time; only Jair the Gileadite dared not go back amidst his own people, but dwelt with the Philistines. There was a daughter of one of the chief men, who was deformed, so that no man amongst the Philistines would have her because of her deformity. She had a shrewish tongue, and was a maker of mischief, and she cast her eyes upon Jair the Gileadite to make love to him because he was good to look upon. But Jair said, "Who

is this woman? Her face affrights me and haunts me in my sleep, so that I have evil dreams; and the memory of her face sitteth at meat with me so that I cannot eat, and all the flesh is fading from my bones. Is she the daughter of a woman, or did she spring from the loins of the night to be a curse and a plague to the sons of men?" And they answered him, saying, "She is the daughter of a man who owns much wealth in vineyards and camels and sheep and oxen, and no man can walk around his growing grain when it is ripe for the sickle without growing weary, so great are his fields." So the next time Jair looked upon the woman he saw not her deformity; when he looked upon the hunch between her shoulders he saw only a hill covered with vines and olives; when they pointed out the hugeness of her hands and feet he saw only broad fields with she-asses and their colts grazing thereon; when he listened to the shrewishness of her tongue he heeded it not, for it sounded to him like the running streams that matured the growing crops on her father's land. And Jair made love to the woman, so that the young men cried, "She hath bewitched him."

But the old man said, "Not so; verily this Hebrew seeth further than most young men, the wealth of the father is a veil for the face of the daughter."

And Jair married the woman; and she brought him much dowry in lands and cattle—a garden of olives and a vineyard likewise she brought him, because her father was full of joy to be rid of her from the house, seeing that he had no peace with her on account of the shrewishness of her tongue, wherewith she made mischief amongst his friends.

So Jair built him a house and sat down to spend his life apart from his own people, and when the Hebrews heard of it they came down and made a mock of him, but he heeded it not, for he said, "He that hath wealth hath power, and he that hath much gold hath always the last word in a matter." But deep down in his heart he hated the Israelites because they despised him, and he laid snares for them to entice them to their undoing. But of all the Israelites he hated none as he hated Samson, who grew daily in manly beauty and strength, so that the maidens sang songs concerning him, and the

young men boasted of him as their champion, whilst the elders of the people admitted him to their councils.

As the seasons came and went Jair grew in wealth, for he did not as the Philistines did, who when they had a little gold or silver went straight away and purchased a field, or a herd of sheep or goats or cattle. Jair did none of these things, but hoarded his gold until he met one amongst the Philistines who needed assistance, and to him Jair lent according to his need, taking always good security for his money, charging usury for all that he lent, so that the people said, "We sow wheat and reap wheat, but this Israelite soweth silver and reapeth gold." And he was a hard man, taking back with two hands what he lent with one. But his wife was harder than he, for she knew that the people mocked her behind her back because of her infirmities; and when one came to Jair to ask for a little more time in which to pay off a debt, Jair would say unto him, "I will not decide this matter, lest thou say I am hard upon thee because I am a stranger amongst you. Go, I pray thee, and lay the matter before my wife;

is she not bone of your bone, flesh of your flesh, surely she will do what is right between us?" But the woman was harder than the man towards her own people, and the man knew it, therefore he said to them, "Go to her." When they had been to her they would say one to the other, "This Israelite is as a hot wind in midsummer, but his wife is as a blizzard that drieth up all things; even the grass withereth where she setteth her foot." So field by field, vineyard by vineyard, herd by herd the substance of Jair increased and multiplied, and he became one of the chief men amongst the Philistines.

And there was a woman of Timnath who was as beautiful as a young doe, and Jair wanted to take her as a concubine because his wife bore him no children; but when he spoke of the matter to his wife she rose up and reviled him, saying that he wanted the Timnite to mock her. And she made life a burden to him, until he prayed that she might die; yet he dared not lay hands upon her because of her brethren, who would have fallen upon him and slain him, in order that his goods might be divided amongst them,—and the maiden was poor.

About this time Samson came down to take part in a feast given by one of the Philistines, and he saw the Timnite, and she pleased Samson because she was fair to look upon, and he made love to her. And it was told to Jair that Samson was in love with the maiden, and Jair said, "He shall not have her; if I cannot possess her, this giant shall not hold her in his arms." And his hot words were told to Samson. Then Samson laughed aloud, and, stretching his great limbs, vowed that the woman should be his, even if he had to slay Jair to get her. To those who had brought him the tale he said, "Go thou and tell this apostate Hebrew that if need be I will pluck her from under his beard; let him take heed that I do not pluck the beard with the woman. Tell him, moreover, that if I lay my hand to his hip all his ill-gotten wealth will not save him."

Then he went out and made merry with the young men of his tribe, as their custom was, in the cool of the evening; and they ran races, and cast the javelin and the spear; then they wrestled and leapt, each man trying to outdo his neighbour; and they invited the Philistines to take part in



THE GIRLS HAD MADE CHAINS AND FETTERS OF FLOWERS

the sports. And it came to pass that Samson tired of the sport, and went a little space aside to dance with the maidens, and a Philistine mocked Samson, saying, "This giant careth more for the caresses of damsels than for feats which fit a man for war." And the saying was repeated to Samson by a busybody who wished to wound Samson because of the favours of one of the maids. And it so happened that when the busybody came to him with the tale, Samson was lying upon a little hill upon the sweet grass, and the girls had made chains and fetters of flowers, with which they had bound his limbs, saying, "Now, thou man of great strength, thou art a prisoner of love." And he, smiling back in their eyes, made pretence to be overcome, for in those days there was nothing so sweet to Samson as the soft round arms of a woman. But when he heard the taunts of the Philistine he was angered, and rose up, thrusting the flowery fetters from him, and he said to that Philistine, "Cast thy javelin with all thy strength, that I may learn something from thee." The man did as Samson asked him to do. And when Samson saw that the man had cast away his weapon, he said, "Is that all that

thou canst show me, thou boaster?" And he took the Philistine by the back of his loin-cloth with his hands, and, lifting him far above the heads of all his fellows, he hurled him after his javelin, and that young man vaunted no more in the camp of the Hebrews.

The fame of Samson's strength went abroad in the land, and there was none like unto him in all the country round about. In stature he was like unto a young cedar, tall and straight; his hair fell almost to his loins in a mass of tangled curls, and its colour was as the colour of ripened wheat when the sun is on the grain; his eyes were large, and blue as the waters in the lake, and the waters were bluer than the skies in mid-summer; the skin upon his body was as white as the skin on the bosom of a young girl; his muscles did not stand out in great bunches as upon other strong men, but ran in rippling waves along his bones, so that he looked more like a woman than a man when he was taking his ease. But when roused to action the muscles played about his limbs like bands of green hide, and he was as supple as a leopard.

In the spring of the year, when the flowers

were beginning to show, and the birds were calling to their mates in the language of love, Samson put sweet-smelling ointment upon his head and combed his hair until it looked like a burnished copper shield slung across his shoulders, and went down amongst the people of Philistia to see once more the woman of Timnath. And when he saw her he wanted her for his wife. And she smiled upon him because of his beauty and because of all that she had heard concerning his strength and valour; but she had no real womanly love for him, because she was not fashioned by nature to love a man for his own worth: a shekel of gold was of more weight in her eyes than the heart of the best man born of woman. Nevertheless, she encouraged Samson in his wooing, lying to him with her eyes, as is the way with such women. And Samson longed for her with a strong man's longing, and he laid the matter before Manoah his father, and the old man said, "Evil will come of this thing, my son. Put, I pray thee, this woman out of thine eyes, for she will prove a snare unto thee, and will bring more trouble than joy into thy life." But Samson would not hearken unto Manoah his

father. Then his mother said unto him, "What canst thou see in her to make thee want her above all women? Are not the daughters of thine own people good enough for thee, as they were good enough for thy father, and thy father's father before thee? The lion does not mate with the jackal, nor the wolf with the fox. Wouldst thou bring shame upon thy mother and thy father?"

But Samson said, "Snow runs in the veins of the aged, wine in the veins of the young; that which I can see in her to please me, I can see; so, I pray thee, let my father go down to her people and make a feast that I may win her, else will I take her with the strong hand, and a worse thing may happen."

So Manoah went down and made a feast, as the custom was, and the Timnite was betrothed to Samson, and he courted her openly in the sight of all men. And there was peace between the Hebrews and the Philistines on account of the betrothal; only Jair nourished anger in his heart because the Timnite was not for him, and he laid in wait for her, when Samson was not by, and spoke with her. In the mornings when she was going down to the great river to bathe, he met her as if by some mischance, and at evening

he would find her amongst the olive trees where he would walk as if seeking for knowledge concerning the growth of the fruit. And the Timnite would veil her eyes as if in anger, but in her heart she rejoiced at the meetings, and Jair knew that she rejoiced. And these things were told to Jair's wife, the hunchback, who made Jair's pillow a pillow of thorns, so that he dreaded the gathering darkness. One night, after he had left Samson's betrothed and had retired to rest, lying by the side of his wife his blood was feverish and he rambled in his speech in his sleep, and the name of the Timnite was continually upon his tongue. And his wife slept not, but lay awake brooding over the tales that she had heard concerning the meetings amongst the olives. When she heard him speak caressingly in his dreams to that other woman, her anger was kindled against him, and in the morning she reviled him, saying, "Thou Hebrew dog, did I not find thee when thou wert a stranger amongst strange people, poor, and of no account? Did I not bring thee wealth, and lift thee from the dirt, and place thee amongst the strong ones? And now thou runnest after a strange face because it is fair to look upon."

Then Jair lied, saying, "It was but a dream." But his wife made answer, saying, "Perhaps it was but in a dream that you went forth to meet the woman amongst the olive trees in the star-light; was it but in a dream that thou didst lay in wait for her on the banks of the river? Of a truth, if such dreams continue I shall ask thy countryman, Samson, the strong man, to interpret those dreams for thee, then thy awakening may not be so sweet as thy dreaming; and this woman may take part in the awakening even as she hath in the dreaming. Thinkest thou, Jair, that because I am deformed in body that I am deformed in mind likewise? Verily I will show thee a thing yet, unless those dreams cease."

Then was Jair's spirit vexed within him. Awake, his flesh yearned for Samson's betrothed so that the sunshine was loathsome to him, and he feared to sleep because he knew that his wife's ear was against his lips all through the watches of the night. And he made up his mind to slay Samson. And to this end he bought from some hunters a young lion, exceedingly fierce, which had been captured in a snare in the mountains. And he made presents to the hunters, and told them to

let the young lion go in a small wood that lay between the home of Samson and the home of the woman he loved; and he charged them that they should say nothing concerning the lion to any man. And the hunters did as Jair commanded them, and took up their gifts and went upon their way. Then Jair went to the Timnite as she sat amongst the olives, and said to her, "Send, I pray thee, a message to this fellow Samson, asking him to meet thee in the wood that lieth between thy home and his, but do not thou go to meet him." And he gave her an anklet of beaten gold of great price, and after she had weighed the gold bauble in her hand she rose up and did as Jair had said. And it was morning when Samson got the message, for the messenger had gone round the wood and not through it, by order of Jair. So Samson put sweet-smelling ointment upon his head and combed out his locks, saying, "Now my beloved crieth aloud for me, as the bird calleth for its mate." And he went across the fields, down the valleys, and over the hills to the little wood, like a great stag that heareth the bleating of the hind, and he carried no weapon in his hand, for love blinded his judgment, and he

knew not of the anklet of gold that his beloved had weighed in her hand—the anklet of gold that was the gift of Jair his enemy. As he walked he lifted up his voice and sang, for the lust of life was strong within him. He sang as the birds sing, because his heart was full of song; he leapt and ran as the stag leaps and runs, because he was full of strength and vigour.

And it came about that as he passed through the little wood that lay midway between his home and the home of the Timnite that the half-grown lion which the hunters had released by the order of the Gileadite, Jair, sprang out of a small clump of trees and roared at Samson, filling all the air with sound, so that the beasts in the fields close by fled in terror. But Samson did not flee; he measured the half-grown brute with his eyes, and said to his own soul, "This animal is stronger than I am, and I am stronger than any man whom I have yet seen, yet if I combine wisdom with strength I can overcome this beast even without a weapon in my hand." Then the lion roared again at Samson, lashing its sides with its tail, and making the foam run from its mouth down its jaws until it was terrible

to look upon ; yet did not Samson turn his back upon the beast, for he knew that if he did, it would surely slay him. So for a little space they stood looking at each other ; the lion, maddened with hunger and anger ; the man, cool, alert, and watchful, every muscle in his beautiful body playing beneath his skin like the muscles of a young war-horse eager for the fray. The lion crouched cat-like to creep nearer to the young Hebrew, but Samson stooped and plucked a sod from the turf and threw it between the eyes of the lion. Then the brute, tossing its mane upwards, launched itself towards the man with a growl of fury. So swiftly did the brute spring that the reddish-brown body looked like a shadow flitting through the forest glades. But quick as the lion was, Samson—the athlete, the champion of the Hebrews—was fleetier in his movements. He did not run, did not leap far from the spot where he had been standing ; but when the lion was in mid-air, and unable to change the course of its flight, he stepped just one pace aside, and the long, lithe body of the brute landed just where the man had stood a hundredth part of a second before. With such fury had the beast launched

itself forward that, when it missed the man, it was hurled forward on to its chest and chin by the velocity of its own furious force. Its claws cut great gashes in the green turf, just as if an angry spearman had struck his weapon into the ground again and again. One great forepaw was doubled up under the brute's belly, the other was spread out past the reeking jaws; the foam from the gaping mouth smeared the grass as the vast head slid along, chin downwards. Before the lion could recover from the shock of its ill-judged spring, before the bloodshot eyes could turn in search of the man, Samson bounded across the prostrate body and threw his arms around the lion's neck, making both his hands meet under the brute's chin; then he placed one of his knees between the lion's shoulder-blades, keeping his other foot firmly upon the turf: thus, summoning all his vast strength to the effort, he wrenched the lion's head backwards towards him, at the same time pressing downwards with his knee between the shoulder-blades. The lion put forth all its powers, struggling with all its native ferocity to turn and rend the man, but Samson never released his grip; the brute roared and

foamed, the man was as silent as fate ; he might have been carved out of solid rock so still was he, only the quick play of the muscles under the skin on his back, and the slowly gathering cords and network of veins on neck and forehead, told of the human life within him. Backward, inch by inch, he bore the lion's head, until the yellow fangs gleamed upwards towards the sky ; deeper and deeper sank the great knee of the athlete in between the brutish shoulder-blades ; lower and lower sank the shaggy chest of the forest monarch towards the earth ; the roarings ceased ; only a deep-drawn rumbling noise, half moan, half growl, came from between the jaws where the foam was now flaked with blood. The athlete's brows were knitted into a frown of fiercest determination ; the strong mouth, even in that terrible moment, wore a half smile which overshadowed triumph ; the great chest, which in its breadth and power looked like the chest of a stallion, rose and fell in the fierce fight for breath ; the yellow curls, now wet with sweat, fell over his shoulders and mingled with the lion's coarser mane ; the air hissed through his expanded nostrils with fierce, sharp sounds ; his blue eyes looked down into the red

eyeballs of the savage: he gave one mighty heave, one giant wrench, the growl in the throat of the lion died to a wail of agony, the neck cracked where it junctured with the backbone—cracked and then broke, and the great shaggy brute lay limp and dead in his arms. For a little space the Hebrew champion stood and looked down upon his handiwork, and his soul was big within him, for he knew that in all the world there was no other man who could have done what he had done. Then he lifted up his mighty arms towards the tops of the cedars, and turned his face to the skies, and gave to the God of his fathers the glory, for he knew that the angels had been nigh unto him during that savage fight. Then, when he had offered up his simple prayer, he went to the little stream that ran through the wood, sparkling in the sunbeams, singing over the pebbles, murmuring amongst the flowers and the grasses; and he laid himself down and let the cool waters play around his hot limbs, until the blood in his veins was cool once more; then, with one glance at the dead lion, he walked onward upon his way, peering between the trees, searching the bushes with his eyes for a sight of

the woman of Timnath, but he beheld her not. Then a great fear took hold of him, and he said to his soul, "What if harm hath come to her? What if the lion hath slain her?" And so great was his fear that he ran, and bounded over the hills and down the valleys like a young buck; for though he feared not the lion for himself, yet for the woman's sake was he afraid. It was nigh upon evening when he came to the village, and one saw him who was a servant of Jair's, and he made haste to go and tell his master that Samson had come. And when he found Jair, he found the Timnite also, for she was walking amongst the olive-trees with Jair, and Jair held her hand, and upon her ankle was the circlet of gold which Jair had given her. And when the servant had delivered his message, Jair said to the woman, "Who is this fellow that I should fear him?" And the woman said, "Why, then, dost thou fear him?" And at that Jair waxed very wrathful and cursed Samson, saying with his mouth, "I do not fear him, yet I wish to God that he had met the lion in the wood"; for he did not know that Samson had met the lion and slain it. And the woman said to Jair, "Thou hadst better leave me now, for if

Samson find thee with me he may do thee an injury." Then Jair boasted, saying, "I will not leave thee, for I do not fear this fellow; he is but a tiller of the soil, and not a man of battle." Yet when he heard the voice of Samson as he drew nigh unto the place, he said to the woman, "Kiss me, I pray thee, and let me be gone." And she put out her lips and kissed him, because of the anklet of gold he had given her. But she said, "If thou dost not fear this man, why dost thou not tarry a while and meet him?" But Jair said, "I must go, for, if I remain with thee, ill blood might rise between us, and I might slay him; then would his people demand his blood at my hands, for they know that I hate him. And, after all, is he not my countryman?"

So when Samson came into the field, Jair crept through a hole in the hedge, and the woman heard him cursing Samson on the far side thereof. When Samson saw her sitting beneath the shade of the olive trees his heart was full of joy, for he had feared for her with an exceeding great fear; he flung himself at her feet and made love to her after the manner of young men; and she, folding her hands upon her lap,

dropped her eyes as if abashed by the fervour of his gaze. When he sought her hand to fondle with it as young men will in the heyday of their passion, she drew back from him, pretending to be angry with him, for she was skilled in all the trickeries of womanhood and knew how to play upon his heart-strings as a skilled harper plays upon the strings of his harp. And when Samson saw that she was wrathful with him he feared her, for he was more afraid of that weak woman than he had been of the lion he had slain in the woods. So the woman, seeing his fear, relented a little and let him play with her hands and twine flowers in her hair, drawing him to her with her eyes and rebuking him with her lips. When he pleaded with her she toyed with him, her smile saying "yea" to him, but her tongue saying him "nay" all the time, until Samson, strongest and boldest of men, was beside himself with love for the wayward woman.

There was joy and pain in the wooing for Samson, but of joy there was none for Jair, who watched all that passed between them from his place behind the hedge, gnashing his teeth and plucking at his beard, for he was mad with envy.

The woman knew that Jair was near by, though she saw him not; some sense within her told her that he was watching her all the time she dallied with Samson, and the knowledge was to her as sweet ointment to her nostrils. But there was one fly in her ointment which robbed it of much of its sweetness, for, as she sat with her hands locked in the hands of the Hebrew giant, the hunchback wife of Jair came across the fields, walking as one who sought something she had lost. When she saw the lovers she hastened her steps and drew nigh unto them, and when she was close to them she threw back her veil on one side, and said to the Timnite, "Hast thou seen my lord, woman?" And the Timnite replied with a falsehood, saying, "I saw thy lord this morning in the fields when I was afar off, but mine eyes have not rested upon him since that time." Then Jair's wife laughed mockingly, crying, "How is it, then, if thou hast not seen my lord since morning, I behold in thine ears the earrings that he purchased from the strangers who came with the camels at noon? Lies fall as readily from thy lips as honey from the comb when it is bruised." Then the Timnite rose and

faced Jair's wife, and reviled her, saying, "Go and look for thy lord, thou misshapen thing! Of a truth our god Dagon hath put a curse upon thee, for thy mind is as crooked as thy tongue, and thy tongue is as crooked as thy body. Do not the women who are newly wed fly from before thee for fear that their children may be like unto thee? And do not the young boys call after thee in the highways and byways, making a mock of thee? saying, 'Go show thy face in the fields, that the birds may die of fright.' Art thou not known in all our cities as a maker of strife between man and wife, youth and maiden? Do I want thy husband, thou crooked branch of a dead tree? If I wanted him I should stand beside thee and let him look upon thee and me. Go home, thou childless one, and prepare cool water to wash thy husband's feet, for he will be footsore and weary if he hath been walking abroad to find another like unto thee in all the land. Go thy way, withered leaf, and know that if I want thy husband I will call him and he will come." For a little space of time the wife of Jair stood silent, but the working of her face was awful to look upon. "Withered leaf and childless one I may

be," she said, in a voice that was deadly in its stillness; "crooked and misshapen I am, yet thou, woman, who playest with men and layest thy hand upon the heart of thy sister woman to bruise it—thou, too, shalt know sorrow, thou too shalt die childless; behold, now I curse thee, and thou shalt be cursed!" Then, turning to Samson, she cried, "Thou art very beautiful, a cedar amongst cedars; thy strength is the boast of thy people and the dread of their enemies. Be warned by me who am only a woman: Trust no daughter of Philistia or thou shalt be led like an ox to the shambles; and, above all, trust not this one, for she will surely betray thee to thy downfall." But Samson, looking upon the Timnite, saw that her face was beautiful and her limbs straight and round, so he spoke angrily to the crippled wife of Jair, saying, "I believe none of thy tales; go thou and look after him who is thy husband; he should be precious to thee, seeing that thy father bought him for thee at a great price."

Then Jair's wife made reply, "Thou, Samson, hast said it, I will go where my sorrow leads me, and thou wilt turn to this wanton as the hog

turns to acorns; but as the hog when he hath eaten his fill turns again to the sunlight, so shalt thou in the end turn from her." Then she drew her veil across her face and walked out of their sight. And the Timnite laughed. But the heart of Samson was heavy because of her words, and because of the ornaments his beloved wore in her ears; and when she rallied him upon his silence he asked her, "Did Jair indeed give thee those ornaments for thine ears?" Then she grew angry with him, speaking mockingly, as one who rubs salt into an open wound, "Art thou indeed a Hebrew, and asketh thou me such a question? Dost thou not know thy countryman Jair better than to ask me concerning such folly? When did Jair ever give with one hand unless he could take back with two? And what have I to give him that he should spend his substance upon me? Art thou still a boy, Samson? Now let me tell thee a thing. If thou art distrustful of me, go thou thy way, and I will go mine own way. I shall not be a widow all my days because of thee, Samson; believe me, thou art not the only flower in the field." So Samson drew her to him and caressed her, and when she had twined her arms

around his neck and had kissed him on the lips, he was as clay in the hands of the potter in the hands of the Timnite. And she did with him as it seemed good unto her; and when he had gone upon his way, she made a hollow with her two hands and laughed therein; and, whilst she yet laughed, Jair came back to her through the rent in the hedge, and he mocked her, saying, "Thou art only fit to be sport for this great swine-herd." And she, throwing her veil apart, lifted her face so that the young moon shone down upon her, baring her arms so that he could feast his eyes upon the whiteness of her skin; and she danced before him so that he might see all her grace and charm. And, as Jair looked, he thought of the crooked figure of his wife, and of the shrewish tongue that awaited him at home; and he stretched out his arms towards her, crying, "Let there be peace between thee and me, I pray thee, for I cannot live without thee." But she continued to mock him, calling out to him as she danced, "Why didst thou not come forth from behind the hedge when the great swine-herd was with me, and tell me then that I was but fit for sport for him or thee? Was it because of thy

sweet wife, Jair? or because thou fearedst thou mightest slay thy countryman, Jair?" Then all the manhood in Jair departed from him, and he cried, "Peace, peace! come and talk to me as thou didst to Samson, and I will bring thee another gold anklet to match the one that thou art wearing." And she answered him with laughter on her lips, telling him to bring the anklet of gold, then would she talk with him. So that night Jair lay awake planning how he might bring Samson to shame. But his wife slept, and in her sleep she wept because she was deformed and childless; but there was no pity in the heart of Jair for the woman whose life was desolate.

So the days passed, and Samson returned to his own people; and he made life a thing of weariness unto his father and his mother because of the woman. And his mother asked him, saying, "What is it, my son, that thou canst see in her? Is she then fashioned differently to all the women of thine own people that thou should'st talk of her all the day and dream of her during the night?" Whereat Samson waxed very angry, and cried, "I see in her just what my father saw in thee, to want thee above all women, though what that was

only God and my father knoweth." So Samson's father went down and made a great marriage feast, which lasted, according to the custom of the Philistines, for seven days. And at the evening of the first day of the great feast, that being the day that Samson took the Timnite to wife, Samson, whose soul was merry, made a wager with the Philistines who were his guests, saying, "Let me put forth a riddle, and if anyone, old or young, wise or foolish, shall answer it before the ending of the seventh day of the feast, then will I give thirty full changes of raiment and thirty sheets; but if by that time you have found no answer to my riddle, then shall you give to me thirty full changes of raiment and thirty sheets." And the Philistines were full of glee, and they shouted, "Let us hear this wonderful riddle, Samson; of a verity it must be full of subtlety if no man amongst us can render thee a reason within seven days." Then Samson, putting one arm around the shoulders of his wife, and resting his elbow upon the board whereon they had spread the feast, with his chin resting in the hollow of his upturned hand, and all the glory of his tangled curls falling down his broad back like rain that

the sunshine gilds with golden hues, said unto his guests, "‘Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness.’ That is my riddle—it is but a little matter, answer it and I will pay thee according to my bond." But none of those men could find an answer that had reason in it; and they were angry, not because they lacked the wit, but because their lack of wisdom would cause them to lose their substance. So they took counsel together, and determined to ask Jair the Apostate to aid them, for they said, "Only a snake knows the way of a snake upon a rock, and none hath subtlety to match the subtleness of a Hebrew, except one who is himself a Hebrew." So they told Jair the wager, and of the riddle that Samson had made for them. Then Jair said, "Why do you come to me with the matter? Is it any of my making?" And the Philistines told him the truth, saying, "We come to thee because thou art Hebrew; that which is dark to us is light to thee. Canst thou solve this thing for us, Jair? Remember we saved thee when thine own countrymen would have none of thee; requite us now, good for good. Art thou not our debtor?" Then Jair said, "I do not

know the answer to this man's riddle, how then can I tell it you? But amongst mine own kindred the hunters do not hold their heads to the tree-tops when they want to hear a sound, but put their ears to the ground; go now, and put your ears to the ground where Samson is, and it is your own fault if you do not know the truth concerning the matter which troubleth you." And the Philistines were filled with wrath, and one said, "Dost thou mock us, thou ungrateful one? Take heed lest we smite thee below the fifth rib, and so let all the mirth out of thee and thy life with it." So Jair drew them apart into a secret place, and said, "I did not mock you, I did but propound a riddle to you. Know ye not that Samson hath set a deep pit for you, so that ye should not only provide him a bride but pay for his wedding-feast also. Take me with thee to-morrow, and make my peace with Samson, and I will put mine ear to the ground for you." And one of the men of Philistia said, "How meanest thou, Jair, when thou sayest thou wilt put thine ear to the ground for us?" Then answered Jair, saying, "Of a truth ye are a dull-witted people; verily, if your feet are as slow as

your thoughts ye will not catch much when ye go hunting. That which I meant, is it not as plain as noontday? When ye have taken me to the feast, and have reconciled me to this man Samson, will I not cajole his wife with sweet words and with gifts to tell me the answer to her husband's riddle, and when she hath told me will I not tell it unto you?" But they still doubted, saying, "Thy plan, Jair, is good, but if he hath not told the woman, how then can she tell thee?" But Jair laughed them to scorn. "Do ye as I have asked of you, and leave the woman to me. Know ye not that in the first hours of married joys a warrior will tell his bride all that is hidden in his breast, yea, even those things which neither his father nor his mother ever knoweth? Rest ye content, if he hath not told her the answer to the riddle he will surely tell her when she seeketh to know; for the stronger a man is, the greater is his weakness when woman hath hold of his heart-strings." So those men went upon their way, and the next day when they met Samson at the festival of marriage, they besought him that he would be reconciled to Jair the Gileadite; but Samson would not, for he

despised Jair. Then his wife pleaded with him also, saying, "If I have found favour in the eyes of my lord, let my lord hearken unto my speech, even though I be but a woman and know naught concerning the wisdom of men." And Samson looking upon her face saw that it filled all his heart's desire, so he said, "Speak the thing that is in thy mind, and it shall be granted unto thee." So the woman, veiling her eyes, said, "Let, I pray thee, peace lie between my lord and Jair the Gileadite. Let my hand bring peace, as a tree in its beauty brings shade. Am I not honoured above all the women of my people, inasmuch as thou hast sought me out to be thy bride? Grant me this favour, so that a blessing shall fall upon me; for it is written, 'The bride who healeth strife between brothers shall dwell within the shadow of peace all her days.' So Samson invited Jair to his feast; but Manoah, the father of Samson, would have none of him. So it came to pass that Jair had speech with the woman, Samson's wife, and besought her to find out from her lord the answer to the riddle. But at first she refused, answering him roughly, crying, "Why should I tell thee, that thou mayest tell them that made the wager

with my lord? Let them that called for the wine pay him that brought it." Then Jair laughed mockingly, and pitied her with his lips, saying, "Of a truth thou art an unhappy bride. Is thy lord then so ill-pleased with thy charms that thou fearest to ask him concerning so small a matter? Of a surety I pity thee; it had not been so had he married a daughter of his own people." Whereat the woman became angered, and said, "Thou art surely thinking of thine own wife, Jair, the crooked one who could charm nothing from any man either before or after marriage; as for me, there is nothing in the heart of Samson, my lord, that he will not tell me." And again Jair laughed, spreading out his hands and raising his eyebrows like one who hears a tale from a far country which he believeth not; laughing low in his sleeve, like a man who is full of mirth which he desires to conceal but cannot, he passed away and left the woman full of rage.

That night when the guests had gone, and Samson was left alone with his bride, he sought her with caresses, but she lay against his heart like an icicle against a pine tree, and he marvelled, saying, "Tell me, thou rose of the

valley, what thing have I done that thou returnest not my caresses? Is this the way with the damsels of Philistia, do they so soon tire of their lords?" And the woman made answer to his speech, saying, "Why should my lord heed the caresses of his handmaid? Am not I but a thing for my lord's pleasure, to be picked up and put down when it seemeth good unto him so to do?" And this saying angered Samson so that he turned from her in his wrath; yet so great was his love for the woman, his wife, that he turned again and pleaded with her. Then she said, "Is it a little matter, Samson, that thou shouldst make a wager with my kinsfolk and yet withhold the thing from me? Tell me, I pray thee, the answer to the riddle." Whereupon Samson laughed mightily, for he had thought her humour had been the fruit of a weightier matter.

"Thou art like a child," he said, "that hunteth the honey bees from flower to flower upon the hillside, seeking that which mayhap may sting thee. Fill thy soul with patience, and in due season the riddle shall be unfolded unto

thee, and to thy people." Upon the morrow, when she met Jair, she said, "He hath told me all, but he made me swear that I should not reveal the matter." Then Jair replied, "I believe thee. He could keep nothing from thee." Then turning his back, as if to hide his mirth, he let her see that his sides were shaking with laughter. So all that day the woman's face was as the face of a woman who mourned for her dead child, and there was no joy in her for Samson, so that he asked her roughly if there was another man hidden in the chambers of her heart, that she should so behave towards him in the presence of all her kindred. And the woman made answer, saying, "There is no man hidden in the chambers of my heart save Samson, my lord; but let me give thee a riddle, Samson." So Samson said, "Give me thy riddle, and if it be not brighter than this my wedding-feast it will be dull past all understanding." Then she said, "Tell me, my lord, if a man hath no tenderness towards a rose when it is just in the bud what will he do to it when it hath passed its bloom and is fading?" Then Samson, resting his bearded chin in the

hollow of his two hands, looked from his wife to Jair the Gileadite, but made no answer, so that the woman girded at him, saying, "Why dost thou not answer me, my lord? is the wisdom of a woman too deep for thee, or is the measure of my wit beneath even my lord's disdain?" Then Samson, combing his beard with his fingers, answered his wife, "Of a surety, woman, I smell more than roses in thy riddle." And she, being blinded by vanity, asked him, "What is it besides roses that thou canst smell?" And her lord told her, saying, "I smell the hand of a man amongst the fragrance of the roses in thy riddle; let him take heed that his feet do not stray in my garden, for I have slain a man for a smaller matter!"

Yet that night, because the woman was still cold towards him, he told her the answer to his riddle; telling her how he had slain the young lion early in the season, in the woods, when he came to tell her of his love. "I left the carcass where it fell, and when I came down to this my marriage-feast, with my mother and my father, I saw that the wild bees had made honey in the jaws of the dead lion; and I took of the

honey in my hands and gave some to my mother and my father, and some I ate. But I told no one how I had killed the lion, neither did I tell anyone from whence I had gathered the honey which we had eaten. And now that thou knowest my riddle see that thou tell no man, for it will be a shame to me to be outwitted by these people."

And the woman swore by her God that she would hide the matter in her own heart, and she lulled Samson with the plenitude of her caresses.

But the next day, when Jair would have passed her by without seeking to know anything, she stopped him, and bantered him concerning the lion he had loosened to slay Samson. Then Jair lied, saying, "The lion is alive and well, only last night the shepherds near the wood were frightened by its roaring and came to me about it, asking me to take my spear and go forth to slay it, that they might sleep in peace." This he said to anger the woman, for he knew that there is no key to the mouth when anger dwells in the heart. And the woman replied, "Take, then, thy spear and go forth to seek the dead lion, thou wilt only find bees building their nests and storing their honey

in the jaws of thy lion, for Samson, my lord, hath slain the beast and hath eaten of the honey that the wild bees hived therein." Then she went upon her way. But Jair went to the Philistines, and said, "I have had my ear to the ground and I have heard a thing, wait thou until the evening of the seventh day, then say to this maker of riddles—'What is sweeter than honey and what is stronger than a lion,' for that is the answer to the dark saying of Samson." So the men waited, as Jair commanded them, until the evening of the seventh day of the feast, and at that time Samson said to them, "Behold the evening of the seventh day hath come, can ye now declare my riddle to me?" Then one of the guests arose and said, "Ho, Samson, tell us, if thou canst, what is sweeter than honey and what is stronger than a lion." Whereupon Samson looked very hard first at Jair, then at his wife; then he said, "Of a surety thou hast answered me, but I know well that if thou hadst not ploughed with my heifer thou hadst not found out my riddle. Yet will I pay thee the price agreed upon,—should I, being a Hebrew, not have known that flies get into an open mouth,—I will pay the price to the utmost;

not because of any wisdom of thine, but as a penance for mine own folly. In six days I will send thee the thirty sheets and the thirty changes of raiment." And he invited Jair the Apostate to remain a while with him when the rest had gone, saying, "Behold I have six skins of wine from a far country which I fain would have thee taste, Jair, that I may have thine aid in judging its value." But Jair gathered his garments about him and fled to his own place, for Jair knew Samson. So Samson said, "Now am I certain what man it was who ploughed with my heifer. Peradventure I may fall across him in due season, then will I take him by the beard and by the hair that is upon his head; and if I tear not his jaws asunder, may my right hand fail me in battle, for this man is a cloud between me and the woman who is my wife."

Nevertheless Samson dissimulated his wrath before his wife, and spoke with her as one in whom he trusted; yet did he not trust her, for the glamour had gone off him, for she had been his for seven days, and the passion for her that had eaten him up of old time had grown cool. So he made her sing and dance before him. And she, believing

that no man could look upon her when she danced for his pleasure alone, and not love her, laughed in the hollow of her hand as she sent a message to Jair, saying, "Knowest thou not a thing stronger than a lion and sweeter than honey? Samson hath found it, for he hath looked upon it and he hath become weaker than water." And Jair sent the messenger back with a present, a veil of great price, which the woman loved to wear, and he charged the messenger, saying, "When thou hast presented my gift to the woman, ask her what is it that Samson hath seen that is stronger than a lion and sweeter than honey." And the messenger did as he had been commanded. And when the woman had taken his present, she said, "Say to Jair the Gileadite, 'A bride that danceth before her lord to please him, she is stronger than a lion and sweeter than honey.'"

When Jair received that message he cursed the wife of Samson, and her mother, and her kindred, and all her father's house, saying, "If I had not saved her the Philistines would have utterly destroyed her as soon as Samson had gone upon his way." For Jair remembered only that

he had saved the woman from the wrath of her countrymen, and did not remember that it was done to despite the man he hated and feared, even Samson, the woman's lord. And Jair's wife, she whom the beautiful Timnite had called a crooked bough and a withered leaf, tried to console him and soothe him in his anger, but he would have none of her. "Come to me, thou beautiful one," he cried mockingly; "let me cut a reed from the banks of the river and pipe unto thee, that thou mayest dance before me and charm the evil spirit from me with thy beauty." And this he said to wound her, knowing that she was crippled and hunchbacked and unpleasing to the eye. Then she waxed angry with him, and cried, "True, O my lord Jair, I am not as beautiful as this Timnite woman, but, O my lord, if I am not fair to see I am true to the vows I made thee." And Jair laughed at her, crying, "The pitcher that is foul a man may leave in the field, for no thief will touch it; but the pot that is of great price he guardeth lest another man take it from him. Thou hast been a true wife to me, woman, as thou sayest; but tell me, I pray thee, what other man in all Philistia would waste a favour

upon thee?" And that speech rankled in the heart of the woman, so that when he slept she rose up and went to Samson and told him all. And Samson said, "Abide a while in patience, then I will avenge thee and myself also." And she said, "How canst thou avenge me and thyself? Tell me, I pray thee, that I may help thee, for though I am not fashioned as other women, yet our god Dagon hath given me more wisdom than is given to most women. Mate thy strength with my cunning, Samson, then thou wilt not fail. Who is there that can escape from the lion and the serpent?"

So he told her what was in his heart to do. "My wife danced before me that I might be blinded to her wrong-doing, but it was she who was blinded, for I did but act a part, and when she said, 'Let me love thee, Samson,' I rebuked her not, and when she kissed me upon the mouth and cried, 'Let me braid thy tresses for thee, Samson,' I suffered it, and said unto her, 'Tell me, I pray thee, where all thy kinsfolk dwell who were not at our marriage feast, for I would visit them with a gift.' And she told me that of all her father's house who came not to the

wedding feast, the greater part dwelt in the pleasant Valley of Ashkelon, where they tend their flocks and herds." And Jair's wife said, "It is even so, in the Valley of Ashkelon thou wilt find them, dwelling apart from all the rest of the people. See thou to it, Samson, that thy gift lacks nothing in the giving, for this woman hath deserved much from thee, more perhaps than thou knowest." And Samson swore by his beard that they who dwelt in the Valley of Ashkelon would not consider his gift lightly. "And when I have avenged myself, and have returned to pay that which I owe to those who read my riddle, then, as our God liveth, I will seek out thy husband Jair, if he be still living, and will not forget what is owing to him."

The next day Samson left his wife, and gathered together fifty young men, all Hebrews, whose valour he had proven, and they went into the Valley of Ashkelon, where they found many of Samson's wife's kinsmen, who said, "What art thou doing here, thou and these young men with thee?" And Samson said, "We have brought thee a gift"; and he smote the man who had spoken with his clenched hand so that he died.

Then he and the men who were with him fell upon the shepherds of Ashkelon, and put them to the sword; it was not a battle, it was a slaughter, for the men in the valley were not prepared and knew not of his intention. And Samson took as his share of the spoil thirty changes of raiment and thirty sheets, and put the spoil upon the asses, and so went back to where his wife dwelt. Then he called those men together whom he had owed, according to the terms of his riddle, and paid them each according to his vow, but he told them nothing concerning his journey into Ashkelon. And it came to pass that when Jair's wife saw Samson with his band of young men, her heart went out towards Jair her husband, and she said to him then, "Take thou the fleetest camel that thou dost possess and fly with all speed to one of our strong cities, for Samson is come with an armed band to take thy life because of the evil that exists between thee and the woman who is his wife."

And Jair vaunted, saying, "I do not fear this man, yet is it unseemly for me who am a man of substance to quarrel with him; and, moreover,

I have business with the merchants of thy people who dwell in El-Jirah, and I have made a vow to visit them, else would I stay and confound this vain fellow who thinketh that all the world is afraid of him. Some day, when my javelin taketh him between the ribs, he will wish that he had kept clear of my path, yet if I stay now I may have to slay more than him, and I would not have the blood of any of those young men upon my hands. Make haste, therefore, I pray thee, and make ready those things which I shall need for a far country. As for me, I will prepare the fleet camel which came to me in exchange for the corn and the oil at the close of the last harvest; it hath no equal for speed, and for seven days it can endure without water, so that I may go by the way of the great desert where no man who hath not such a beast to bear him can follow." So his wife made haste to prepare his vestments and the food that he would require, and she made ready also a bag of money, for she said, "Money is a key that will open any gate, for it talketh the tongue of all languages, and maketh the stranger at home in all countries." And when Jair was ready to

depart, his wife said, "Swear unto me now, Jair, by thine own God, that if thou comest out of this trouble, and shall not die, thou wilt have none of this woman who hath come between us." And Jair would have refused her, for his blood was full of the poison brewed by the kisses of the Timnite; but, as he paused before replying, one came running to him, whose evil tidings were written all over his face; and he said to Jair, "My lord, hasten while there is yet time; Samson cometh with a band of armed men, and the life of my lord is the thing he seeketh." So Jair moved off with great swiftness, and, as the dromedary moved, Jair's wife lifted her hands beseechingly, crying, "Swear the thing I asked of thee ere we part." And Jair, looking over his shoulder in fear of Samson, cried, "I swear it by the God of my fathers"; yet the words came not from his heart, but from his lips only.

When Samson came to the house of Jair, and found that he had fled, he was moved to anger towards the Gileadite's wife, saying, "This is thy doing, woman; thou hast delivered my enemy out of my hand. Is there no woman whom I may trust?" And the woman said, "Be

not angry with me, Samson, though I have betrayed thee in this matter, for I did it to save the life of my lord." Whereat Samson marvelled greatly, for it seemed to him passing strange that she whose heart Jair had bruised, as a man bruises flowers with his heel, should stand between him and his danger. But Samson understood not the ways of women, knowing not that a loving wife clings to the shattered wreck of him she loveth, even when he abideth alone broken upon the wheel of his own mis-doing. And Samson said, "Where has the man, thy husband, gone? and when did he go?" And the woman, hardening her heart, replied, "He has gone towards the setting sun to meet a caravan of merchants who are coming to him with spices. He left me these three days gone, and is now far upon his journey." So Samson left her in peace. But one of the servants of Jair, who loved him not because of some harsh speech uttered in anger, told Samson that the woman deceived him, and this he did in the hope that he might find favour in the eyes of the Hebrew champion, whose fame was beginning to spread through all the country round

about. So, when Samson questioned him, he said, "Behold, Jair was with us but a little time back, my lord; the track of his camel, which he rideth, hath not yet been lifted from the grass by the wind and the sun. He fled far and fast because his wife told him thou wert coming down to fall upon him; neither did he go towards the setting sun, but the camel which he rideth is the swiftest beast that hath been seen in this land. Now, I pray thee, let me have a gift at the hands of my lord, for I have surely told that which is true." Then Samson, looking upon that servant, made answer, "Thou dog that biteth the hand that fed thee with thy daily bread, thou knave that art false to the salt thou eatest, thou shalt indeed have a gift at my hands!" And Samson smote the false servant upon the thigh with his clenched hand, so that he no more walked upright upon his two legs, but was a cripple to the day of his death; and the children pointed him out to one another, crying, "Take heed that ye be not false to your salt, lest ye become even as this thing that crawls." And the cripple was a byword in all Philistia as long as he lived.

So Samson left that place and returned to his own people, and he went not near to his wife, but treated her slightly. And she, when she heard he was leaving, put on her best garments and lay in wait for him amidst a grove of olive trees through which she knew he would pass, for she thought to charm him again with her beauty; but when Samson saw her he passed by swiftly, and his talk to his friend on the homeward way was not of love but of battles. And when his mother saw him she said, "How now, my son, where is thy bride?" And he said, "Let the matter pass as though it had not been, ask me not concerning the woman, let it suffice that she is still dwelling in the house of her father." And his mother was grieved for her son, and putting dust upon her grey head she lamented, crying, "O Samson, my son Samson, most beautiful amongst all the children of men, has a woman indeed brought thee to shame?" Then Samson made a mock of his mother's grief, saying, "Why dost thou put dust amidst thy grey hairs, my mother? Why dost thou lament for so small a matter? Behold, when a woman is old she seeth but one fig that is worth plucking

upon a tree ; but a man, when he is young, if that which he hath plucked first doth not taste sweet to his mouth, throweth it away and picketh another ; and this fig which I have gathered, is it the only one which is within my reach ? I will wait a while and better fruit will fall at my feet with every wind that bloweth." And Samson laughed, and went amongst his comrades singing, yet his mother knew that his heart was sore within him because of the woman who was his wife, but who had become to him as a stranger.

The seasons came and went each in its turn, and Samson's heart yearned towards his wife ; but he hid it from his fellows, going with the hunters to the hunting, and working with the husbandmen in the fields, until they said, " There is no man in the land like Samson for sport, or war, or toil." Yet of his wife he heard never a word, either good or bad. As for the Timnite woman, she did not die of grief concerning her lord, but when the summer had passed and he came not, neither sent word to her, she hated him, partly for his neglect of her, and partly because of the slaughter he had wrought amongst her kinsfolk. So she said to her own soul, " I will wound him so that he will feel

the wound worse than the thrust of a spear, neither shield nor buckler shall hide the wound from the eyes of his friends." So she sent one whom she could trust to the city of El-Jirah, where Jair the apostate Hebrew dwelt, and said to him, "Why dost thou tarry so far away from one who loves thee? Come now, or remain away for ever. As for that other one, the Hebrew giant with the lion's mane, he will not return to vex thee. He is happy amongst his sheep and his kine, the love of a woman is not for such an one as he is."

When Jair received that message he bade farewell to the merchants of El-Jirah, and made all speed to his own home. And his wife when she saw him fell upon his neck and wept for joy, for she knew not of the messenger that Samson's wife had sent, and she was happy. But on the morrow, whilst it was yet early, Jair rose up, saying, "I have been away far too long, I must now go and see which of my servants have been faithful and which have robbed me whilst I have been sojourning in El-Jirah." And his wife believed his words. But when he had left the house a little way, and was hidden by the trees, he turned his

steps towards the home of the Timnite; and she was at the window waiting for him—for she knew of his return and knew that he would first seek her privily; and she was glad, yet did she hide the light of her joy behind a mantle of anger—for with her all plain dealing was impossible, she being one of those who cannot draw a thread of silk through her fingers without an artifice. And Jair said, “Why art thou angry with me? Didst thou not send for me, and have I not come? Did I tarry by the way? Thy voice reached me like the cooing of a dove; I came to thee on the wings of an eagle.” “Nay,” she said, “thou dost not come to me like a dove on the wings of love, but thou comest like a thief at the dawning, so that none may see thee; and when thou hast feasted thy soul with stolen love, like a thief wilt thou depart, thinking only of the withered leaf in thine own home and of thyself, Jair.” Then Jair cursed his wife, and said, “A withered leaf and a crooked bough she is, and I am weary unto death concerning her. I would that I had thee by my side day and night, for I am grown weary of the face of my wife.” And the Timnite said, “Wilt thou take me in the sight of all men to be thine

handmaiden?" And he, seeing not the snare that was set for him, even as the bird in the forest seeth not the snare set by the fowler, said, "Yea, in the sight of all men I will take thee even unto mine own house to be mine handmaiden, and thou shalt be the mother of the children who shalt inherit all my wealth." Then Jair went to the woman's father, and said, "Give me, I pray thee, thy daughter who was wedded to my countryman Samson. He hath left her this long time lonely, and it is not meet that one so beautiful should dwell alone." And the man was troubled, for he feared Samson. And when Jair saw that the man feared Samson, he said, "Do not fear this Samson—he will never come nigh unto her again; he hath sent me tidings, saying, 'Before the woman was my wife I loved her, but afterwards my soul sickened because of her; it is not meet that the lion and the ass should mate.'" So the man gave his daughter to Jair to be his handmaiden, and Jair gave the man a vineyard. And Jair took the woman to his own home, and she bowed herself before the cripple, and pretended to do her reverence, as it was fitting for one who was but a handmaiden. But

the cripple knew that whilst the Timnite did her homage with her mouth she mocked her with her eyes, for the eyes of the handmaiden always seemed to be saying, "Thou withered leaf, thou crooked bough."

And Jair drew more and more away from his wife, and clave closer day by day to the beautiful daughter of Timnath, so that the cripple's soul died within her, and she mourned day and night, saying to herself, in the lonely hours between the setting and the rising of the sun, "I am a widow who am no widow, for my husband still liveth. I was a cripple in my body from my birth, but now my spirit is crippled also, for there is none in all the earth to love me. I would that I were dead, for the dead know rest from sorrow, but before I die I will be avenged of mine enemies." So she laid her plans warily, sending to her kinsmen in all the cities belonging to the Philistines, saying, "Stir up anger against Jair the Gileadite, so that he be forbidden to enter any of our cities on pain of death; this do, and when his end cometh all that I have shall be divided amongst you." And her kinsfolk did as they were bidden, for they hated to see so much wealth

in the hands of an Hebrew. So messengers came from the cities near and far, warning Jair that if he set his feet within their gates he would surely be slain. Whereat Jair laughed and, satiated with his new love, became day by day a harder task-master to those who laboured for him; and to those who were in his debt he became more cruel, taking all that they had in default of what was his due, until they cried, "We are as corn between two millstones, between this Hebrew and his wife, who is of our own people." When the cripple heard that they so spake, she helped then privily, building up for herself many friends; and when she had done these things she caused messengers to go to the place where Samson dwelt with his people, and she charged the messengers, saying, "Be watchful over your mouths, and do that for which I shall reward you. Go and talk of the beauty of the woman who was wife to Samson, the champion of the Hebrews. Sing her praises, so that men shall wonder to hear you; but do not let them know that she is hand-maiden to my lord, else will Samson keep away from her, for shame's sake; for it is like a man to boast that he threw away a thing that he hath

lost and another hath found. The messengers went upon their way, and did as the cripple commanded them. And the fame of Samson's wife's beauty spread through all the camps of the Hebrews, like fire through a field of flax, so that Samson began to hunger for a sight of the face of the woman he had loved, and he said, "I will take a gift in my hand and go down and make my peace with her."

CHAPTER IV

THE CITY OF SANCTUARY

FAR out beyond the bounds of Judah, upon the banks of the great river, the Hebrews had caused a city to be built which was known to all men as the City of Sanctuary. And there the priests had erected a temple. Day and night a priest stood before the altar of the temple, burning incense; lighted tapers were burning there unceasingly, for it was the law that if any man did an evil thing, worthy of death, towards his fellows, he might fly to the City of Refuge and find sanctuary. And it was written that the evil-doer had to run upon his two feet, using no beast of burden to help him in his flight; and his pursuer, likewise, had to run after him; and it was not lawful for any man to help him that ran, or him that pursued. The blood debt was a matter that rested between the wrong-doer and the avenger.

If the pursuer came upon his adversary without the walls of the city, he might slay him forthwith; if he laid hands upon him within the city, before he had entered the temple and prostrated himself before the altar, he might slay him; but when the evil-doer had prostrated himself, then no man might lay hands upon him, for he was protected by the mercy that radiated from the altar. If the wrong-doer entered the temple with the avenger upon his heels, and prostrated himself, and the avenger sought to slay him, then the priest would cast himself between them as a symbol of the mercy of the God of the Hebrews. If after the priest had covered the wrong-doer with his mantle the avenger still sought him with sword or spear, then the priest would call the congregation within the walls of the city to rise as one man and stone the avenger to death, and they should be guiltless, because it was the law. But if the avenger went forth from the city and camped beyond the walls, pitching his tent as far away as a slinger could cast a stone, he might lie in wait for his enemy; and if the wrong-doer came forth from the city by night or day, and his adversary came upon him, then might his

adversary put him to the sword, and no questions be asked him why or wherefore—that was the law. It was also written that watchmen should stand upon the walls night and day to look for those who fled for sanctuary, and when they saw one running towards the city each watchman had to call aloud to his fellows, and they all called to those within the gates, "Make the path clear to the temple, for one runneth seeking refuge." Whereat all who were in the streets forsook them, leaving every street, highway, and byway clear for him who came, so that his life might be saved for him. Sometimes they who fled reached the very gates of the city and fell from exhaustion; and the avenger coming upon them, as they lay faint and panting, put the fallen to death in the sight of the whole city. Sometimes the panting wretch fleeing from death traversed the streets of the city of refuge, drawing deep, sobbing breaths, staggering from side to side, only to be slain on the very threshold of the temple. Many were drowned trying to cross the river, others fell by the spear in the hills beyond the river, and many others perished at the teeth of wild beasts in the forests that

girdled the hills; but few reached the City of Sanctuary, excepting the fleet and the strong. And it was towards this city that Jair the Gileadite was turning his eyes, for word had reached him that his enemy Samson was coming down from Judah to seek his wife; and Jair was afraid, for he knew that he had committed the unforgivable sin; and it was then that he understood that an enemy had been at work against him in Philistia, closing all the cities against him, so that there was no place where he could hide his head except the far-off City of Sanctuary.

In his hour of distress he took counsel with his handmaiden, who had been wife to Samson, saying, "I have fallen upon evil days because of thee, help me now, I pray thee, to make an end of this matter. I cannot go back to mine own people, for they would slay me. All thy people hate me, saying, 'This Hebrew hath sown with one hand and reaped with two.' All thy cities have been closed to me by some secret enemy. If I would save my life, I must fly upon my two feet to the City of Sanctuary; and if I fly upon my two feet, I must leave all my wealth behind

me. How then shall I act, for it is certain that Samson will come to seek me?" And the woman said, "If thou wert indeed a man, thou wouldst not ask me, saying, 'How shall I act?' Instead of seeking a place to fly to thou wouldst gird a sword upon thy thigh, and take a spear in thy hand, and go forth and lie in wait for this boaster in the forest. What is he more than another, that all the marrow in thy bones should turn to water when his shadow falls upon the grass?" But Jair said, "He is very terrible in battle, and no man can stand before him. He would tear me asunder with his two hands as a boy parteth the grass in the meadows. Only the cunning of a woman can undo him; wilt thou entrap him to his undoing?" But she would not, for she too in her heart feared the wrath of Samson. So Jair told her, saying, "Thou hadst better go back to thy father's house, and I will make thee my treasure-house, and then I will fly swiftly to the City of Refuge; and when I am secure there, thou and thy father can come to me, for I am tired of this land. There is no perfume in the flowers, and the song of the birds is without music, and there is no warmth in the

sunshine." So the woman, seeing into his heart, said, "Give me thy treasure and I will garner it, and when the time is ripe I will come to thee."

And the speech pleased Jair, and he made haste to gather all that he could of gold and silver and precious stones, sweet-smelling ointments and spices, fine linen and rich apparel, and all those things he stored at the house of the woman's father.

Then he took only a spear to guard him from the wild beasts, and a little food in a wallet which he bound across his shoulders, and a purse of gold, and some precious stones which were almost beyond price; these he had sewn in a girdle which he wore around his waist. So, waiting until the moon arose, he started forth to seek the City of Refuge. Of old time, when he had dwelt amongst his brethren in Judah, he had been famed far and near for his fleetness of foot, so that the men had said there is none like Jair for swiftness; he could run down a stag in its prime. But the life he had led as a lender of money in Philistia had caused him to lose his fleetness, for he was fat and heavy; so, when he started, he moved slowly, husbanding his breath

and his strength, for he knew that the journey would bring his speed of foot back to him. Therefore he moved cautiously, walking easily and with care, that he might not bruise his feet upon the stones, for his feet were very tender. Then it was that he cursed the slothfulness of his life amongst the Philistines, for of old time, when he had been a hunter and a dweller in tents, his flesh had been as hard as the wood of a young olive tree; but during his sojourn in Philistia, after he had married his wife, he had not joined the hunters, neither had he partaken of the sports of the young men. When he had moved abroad he had caused his servants to carry him upon a litter, or he had ridden upon the back of an ass, so that his flesh had become as soft as the flesh of a woman. He had forsaken the simple life of his fathers, and had become a wine-bibber, an eater of spiced meats and rich cakes. All these things had seemed good to him in the days of his ease, but when he came to fly before Samson he knew that the old simple life was the proper life for a man; and he repented him that he had not lived according to the training of his youth, for from childhood to

manhood a bed upon the grass with the music of the wind through the leaves of the trees had seemed sweet to him. In those old days he drank nothing but a draught of water from the running brook, and his food was a little wheaten cake, with the flesh of a goat or a kid, and wild honey gathered in the forests; dainty things he had not known, excepting a bowl of sweet milk, or a handful of fruit plucked in its season. And in those days Jair could outrun a wolf without tiring. So now when his life depended upon his speed of foot he bethought him of the days when no man could outrun him, and he said to his own soul, "If this great creature Samson comes after me hot-foot I shall surely perish, for he is one who is always abroad upon the mountains at the dawning, and the setting sun finds him beating the woods in search of sport, for his strength never fails him. Yet if he comes not too swiftly after me, but giveth me time to make myself as once I was, then will I laugh at him, for he is big and heavy, and his very strength maketh him slow-footed. He calleth himself the lion of Judah, but a fox can outwit a lion. Have I not studied the ways of a fox since I

was a little child, are not all his ways known unto me?"

That evening, when the sun was going down, Jair laved his body in a running stream, kneading the muscles of his legs with great care, and when' he had dried himself he took ointment and dressed his feet, treating them tenderly. Then he collected some berries that were known to him, and ate them to purge himself, for his breath was thick in his throat and chest; a draught of clear water from the stream, and a little dried goat's flesh with a wafer of bread, was his evening meal, and a bed of moss which he sought and found in a great cleft in a rock was his couch. He slept with his spear in his hand, for fear of the wild beasts that might scent him whilst prowling in search of their prey; and at midnight, when he heard the mountain leopards growling around him, his heart was filled with bitterness, and he said, "Of a truth he who steppeth from the right path putteth his feet on thorns. If I had been true to mine own people I would not now be an outcast, hiding thus from the wild beasts of the mountains. I sought honey that was not lawful for me to seek, and behold it hath

turned to gall in my mouth." At the dawning he arose, and all his limbs were sore; his feet also were as the feet of a little child, yet he knew that he must go onward or die; and the fear of death was very great in Jair, so he walked slowly until the sun rose and the freshness of the morning air and the motion of walking took the soreness from his limbs. At sunrise he ate a frugal meal of dried figs and a wafer of bread washed down with water, then he laved his body in the clear running stream, and anointed his limbs where they were chafed with the juice of a herb that grew wild; and his spirits rose, for he said, "If Samson does not come upon me for a week from this day, then I will laugh at him, for he will know that he hath come forth to seek the wind." Yet all that day he walked with his chin upon his shoulder. If a bough broke behind him in the forest his heart stood still. If a bird rose suddenly, frightened by some prowler of the wilderness, then Jair doubled from his path like a fox, and crouched trembling behind a rock or in a hollow. Once when the wind, rushing through the woods, made a sound like the voice of a man shouting, Jair grasped the limbs of a

tree and swung himself upwards and hid amidst the branches like a tree-leopard, lying flat along a great bough in the hope that Samson would pass him by, for the fear of Samson was with him always. And so for five days did Jair the Gileadite pursue his way towards the City of Sanctuary, and he neither heard nor saw anything of his enemy; still his fleetness of foot had not come back to him, neither had the fat that had gathered upon him in the time of idleness faded from his body. At times he forsook his walk, and ran steadily, like an old wolf, to strengthen his lungs; but when he tried to dash forward at great speed a pain shot through his liver like a dart, the coarse blood that had been thickening in his veins during the time of his rich living in Philistia filled the veins around his neck and caused his brain to throb almost to bursting. So he continued steadily, hoping that his enemy might not come to him before the grossness had departed from him.

Meanwhile, Samson had said farewell to his mother and his father, and, taking a gift in his hand, he went down to see his wife. When he came to the house of her father he saw the old

man sitting close by the doorway, and Samson saluted him with kind words. But the old man trembled at the sight of the majestic figure that stood before him, and Samson said, "Tremble not before me, I pray thee, let that which is past be forgotten, for I have come with a gift in my hand to make my peace with thy household." And a young damsel hearing Samson's voice came out, and she was of exceeding great beauty, and Samson smiled upon the damsel, for he knew her to be his wife's sister, and he said, "Where is my wife?" And the damsel replied, "My sister, thy wife, is in her own chamber." And Samson said to the old man, "Suffer me now, I pray thee, let me go in and speak with my wife." But the old man would not so suffer him, and a cloud gathered upon Samson's brow; so the old man cried, "Hearken to me now, Samson, for I would deal uprightly with thee, seeing we both be men. Thou didst leave my daughter when she had been wedded to thee but a few days, and, not content with that, thou didst go forth and work evil amongst her kindred; then, full of thine own imaginings, thou wentest back to thine own people; and one came to me, saying, 'Samson

hath sent me word by a faithful messenger that he no longer loveth thy daughter, but hateth her, and he will no more come nigh unto her.'” Then Samson, leaning upon his spear, said, “O kind and faithful friend that did pour sand into a sore wound to heal it. Where is the woman?” And her father said, “Be not wrathful towards me, Samson, for I am old. I gave my daughter to thy friend to be his handmaiden, because it seemed to me that thou didst utterly hate her; but here is this damsel, her sister, who is more beautiful than she, take her, I pray thee, and let there be peace between us.” When Samson heard that saying from the lips of his wife's father, he walked away swiftly to the house of Jair the Gileadite, and Jair's wife came forth to meet him. And Samson said, “Where is thy lord, woman?” And the cripple said, “He is not within the house, he hath fled on foot towards the City of Sanctuary”; and she pointed out to him the way that her husband had gone. And Samson, looking into her face, knew that she was not lying to him a second time.

There was one standing by who overheard the speech of the cripple to Samson, and this one

was steward to Jair, and related to that man whom Samson had smitten with his hand on the thigh; and he said, "It is vain for my lord to look towards the City of Sanctuary for his enemy, seeing that he whom he seeketh hath many days' start of my lord upon the journey. Let my lord take the woman who was his, and be content; it is true that she hath been handmaiden to Jair, but what of that, is she not my lord's wife?" And the saying stung Samson like the stroke of a whip, whereupon he cast his spear at the steward; but the man, who was watching him, threw himself flat upon his face, so that the spear passed by him and was transfixed in the door of the house. And the steward rose up quickly and fled, and there was no order about his going.

So Samson made ready for the pursuit of Jair. He too took nothing with him but his spear, and a little food in a wallet, for he said, "The earth is my table, whereon the banquet is always spread. The wild fruits that grow for the birds of the air, are they not mine also? The honey that the bees store in the secret places of the woods, is that not his who finds it? Water that

is found in the running brook is better than wine from a leathern bottle; as for the rest, my spear will provide." Then he commenced to hunt for Jair as he would have hunted for a fat wolf, and when at last he found the way that his enemy had gone he drew his girdle tight, and ran. He did not rush off with the speed of a young colt freed from captivity, but ran with his head thrown back like a buck, crossing the ground with long slow strides that made the distance fade. It was morning when he started upon his quest for the man he hated, the man who had stolen his wife from him. At noon he moistened his mouth with water, and partook of a little dried fruit from his srip, and then ran on with the long tireless stride of the prowler of the forest. At the setting of the sun he paused a while and ate sparingly of his store, then, using his spear as a staff, he walked with the swift springy stride of a man whose whole life had been passed in such labour. When the moon came out he threw himself down amidst a patch of deep grass and slept the sleep that comes to man in perfect health after a hard day's toil; but the dawning found him as fresh as a young boy, with every

muscle in his body plastic and supple. Forward he made his way, rejoicing in his strength, fearing nothing, neither man nor beast. When he came to a river he plunged in and swam across it boldly, for no currents were too strong for him, and he rejoiced in the contest with the waters. The hills did not stop him, for their steepness but roused his temper. The tangled undergrowth in the forest delayed him, but he caught the masses of the twining undergrowth in his arms and wrenched it from his pathway. All day long in front of him he could see the mocking face of the woman who had been his wife, and the handmaiden of Jair his countryman. He saw the deep blackness of her hair, the soft beauty of her eyes, like the eyes of a doe in the early days of spring. He saw the redness of her mouth, like the redness of a flower with the dews of morning upon it. When his heel bruised the wild geranium on the hillsides, the fragrance brought back to his mind the sweet fragrance of her breath when she had nestled by his side at the feast that followed his wedding; and the memory of those things was like wine to his blood, for he knew that the woman could never

again be anything to him, because of what had been whilst she was handmaiden to Jair; and he longed to come up with his enemy, so that the fierceness of the race for life, and revenge, might take the woman's memory from his heart. "I will take his head back," he said, "and lay it at her door, so that she may know that it is not wise to make a mock of Samson."

So the days passed, but Samson saw not Jair. As for the Apostate, his fleetness came back to him hour by hour, day by day, and his feet spurned the ground as they did when he had been a hunter; and as his speed increased, his fear lessened, for he said within himself, "My speed and my wit will overcome the strength and stubbornness of Samson."

It was evening, the sun had hidden himself behind a bank of clouds, turning the western heavens to a mirror of glory, before bidding the world good-night. A small brook trickled in and out amidst a clump of cedar trees that formed a natural arbour in a glade that nature had carved out of the heart of the far-spreading forest; overhead, climbing plants twined caressingly around the branches of the trees, reaching from cedar to

cedar, until a leafy screen was formed between earth and sky. Underfoot, the mossy softness of the grass made a carpet for the ground of wondrous beauty. Reclining at his ease, with his feet dallying with the sparkling water, lay Jair the Gileadite. The white roundness of his form had departed from him. He had become lean and lithe; his eyes were bright and keen; his skin dark olive, with the tan of the sun and wind above the natural pallor. As he lay thus watching the ripples on the water, he looked like a greyhound basking in the shadows. A branch near by broke suddenly, the grass seemed to rustle, a fox that had been watching Jair from a safe distance darted off with speed. Jair sprang to his feet, his right hand clutched his spear, his left hand was clenched hard against his side, his head was thrown forward, his nostrils opened and closed like the nostrils of a horse smitten with fear, his body was bent like the body of a runner waiting for the signal to start upon a race. A moment passed; the boughs that fell almost to the edge of the water parted a little way down the stream, and Samson pushed his way like a young steer into the clearer space. He was

walking carelessly, as a man walks who thinks his enemies afar off; the spear in his hand he used as a staff, and his eyes sought the water. But in the twinkling of an eye his gaze fell upon his enemy—the one whom he sought! Like a man stricken to stone he stood with one foot advanced, his great chest thrown wide, his head poised like the head of a bull at gaze.

Then he opened his lips and gave a great shout, the noise bursting from his throat and ringing through the trees. When Jair heard that sound, so full of joy and triumph, he cast his spear with all his might full at the bared chest of his enemy and fled as the deer flies when the lion roars. But the spear did not smite Samson; he caught the shaft with the shaft of his own spear and hurled it aside; then he rushed in pursuit of Jair on the wings of hate, but Jair was flying on the wings of fear. So fast did he fly that a stone cast by a strong slinger would scarce have outstripped him. Scudding low, like a hare, he darted down each open glade, choosing the level ground and avoiding the hills, where the strength of Samson would have availed against his lightness of foot. And Samson rushed on in pursuit, his

hair waving behind him like the mane of a wild horse. When Jair came to a cluster of bushes that barred his path he leapt over them with the lightness of a fawn ; but Samson rushed through them, tearing his flesh with the thorns, but heeding not the brambles or the pain of the wounds they made.

When the first wild rush of fear was passed, and Jair, looking back, saw that he could outstrip his pursuer, his courage came back to him, and, with his courage, his cunning returned ; and he no longer ran wildly on but doubled and turned like a fox, making use of all the wiles of his woodcraft ; and his brain was more subtle than the brain of Samson, and this enraged his pursuer so that he exhausted himself rushing hither and thither. And when Jair saw that Samson was growing weary, he darted out into the open country at his topmost speed, and Samson followed him, running heavily and drawing his breath hard. Then Jair, who was as cunning as a serpent, slackened his pace, and stumbled as he ran, like a man sore spent, so that Samson counted him as good as dead, and redoubled his efforts until he drew almost within smiting

distance of Jair. Then the Gileadite shot away from him like a stone from a sling, and Samson strove mightily to overtake him, until his chest became choked, and the blood rushing to his head caused him to reel like one who comes from the press of the battle sore stricken. When Jair saw how it was with Samson, he cursed himself for having cast away his spear, for he said, "If I had a weapon with me now I could slay this giant like an ox, for his wrath hath made him a mad-man; jealousy hath so blinded him that he is no more to be feared than an ox that is yoked to the plough. He hath come out to seek for my head, mayhap he may lose his own; for a serpent that hath been singed by fire is more to be dreaded than a lioness that hath been robbed of her whelps; and this man has singed me these many times."

When Samson found that he could run no faster he rested a while, and gave himself up to thought, for darkness was now come upon the earth. So he cast himself down, and when his blood was cool he said to himself, "So I have behaved as a child in this matter, I might have known that he was not called 'Swiftfoot' by the hunters for

nothing. To-morrow I will start after him as soon as it is day, and pursue him slowly but surely even unto the setting of the sun, running him down as the wolf runs down the full-grown stag, for my strength will outlast his if my head is cool." So Samson slept. But Jair did not sleep, but walked swiftly, guiding himself by the stars, for he knew that there would be no peace for him outside the City of Sanctuary whilst Samson lived. When at last he became weary, he made himself a bed of leaves, and he too slept; but even in his sleep the avenger pursued him, so that his rest refreshed him but little. The dawn found him ready for the race for life, and he pressed on with feverish haste. As for Samson, he too was stirring with the first faint flush of morning. This time he husbanded his strength, wasting it not in vain rushes of speed, but bounding steadily on; he tarried for nothing, yet it was late in the day before he again came in sight of his enemy, who was pressing on towards the goal of his hopes. When Jair saw his pursuer, he paused and gazed at him earnestly, and noted how he ran; and he read Samson's purpose aright, and a great fear came upon him.



HE KNEW THAT DEATH WAS HUNTING AT HIS HEELS

He did not try to beguile his enemy with craft, but, clenching his two hands in front of his chest, he too ran forward steadily; and as he ran he prayed for a forest or darkness, but the land was open and the darkness afar off. But, as he ran, Jair saw the blue line of some hills rising against the horizon away upon his right hand, and he swerved towards them. And when Samson saw Jair swerve from his straight path, he knew that he was running to shelter as a fox runs to earth; and he lengthened his stride so that his pace became swifter and the distance between him and Jair grew less and less; but the hills were coming nearer and nearer with every stride.

Jair did not look behind him. He knew that death was hunting at his heels; he dropped his chin on his breast and ran until the earth appeared to lift in front of him, the skies seemed to drop and meet the earth, blackness and blood seemed ever before his eyes; and in that time he died many deaths. He no longer ran in a direct course, for his feet were beyond the control of his will, so that he staggered to the right hand and to the left like a man who had stayed too long at a feast with the wine before him. Yet

Samson could not come up with him, for he too was sore spent. Yet though he ran until his life was almost gone he could not quite reach Jair, who reeled blindly on until a pass in the hills opened in front of him, and the pass was dark and strewn with great rocks and bushes and low-growing trees. Jair staggered into the pass, and groped his way forward for a little space; then the blood gushed from his nostrils, and he fell as one who is dead. But Samson did not see him fall; when he entered the chasm in the hills he pushed onward and upward, passing so close to his enemy that the blood from Jair's nostrils stained his foot as he passed. And so, for the second time, Jair the Apostate escaped with his life, but his sorrows were not yet at an end; all the night he lay quaking with fear, and the break of day brought him no joy. He needed food and drink, but dread of Samson kept him from going forth to seek it, until his torments became so great that he said, "I will end this; is it not better to go forth and die upon the man's spear than to perish of thirst?"

The sun was beating down upon him where he lay hidden between two boulders of rock, and the

rocks had become so hot that they scorched his flesh. His mouth was swollen and parched with the thirst that consumed him. The fierce race of the previous day had caused his blood to burn like scalded wine in his veins; his eyes were strained and bloodshot; his lips were cracked and puffed out with thick black blood, so that they burst at the corners and in the middle, and the little grey flies settled upon them in a cloud to feast upon him, adding to his torments a thousandfold. So he crept forth from his hiding-place like a wounded beast, and searched for water until he found it; and when he had quenched his thirst and bathed his tortured face he gathered berries from the bushes, and sought locusts to eat, living like a wild man. Once when he sought to capture a young kid that was but a few weeks old he came upon Samson asleep in the shade, and Jair crept on soft feet meaning to slay his enemy with a rock, for he had no other weapon; but, as he drew near to the sleeper, Samson turned in his slumber and reached out his arm, and so great was Jair's terror that he dropped the rock and crouched down amid some bushes like a hare that seeth danger; and the

noise of the falling rock awoke Samson, so that he sat up and looked around him. When his eyes fell upon the bushes amidst which his enemy lay concealed, then Jair's soul shrivelled up within him, and he died many deaths. But Samson did not perceive him, but lay back on the grass with his eyes open, thinking; and Jair, watching him, made up his mind to rush upon him and slay him before he could rise to defend himself. But when he tried to rise to carry out his plot there was no strength in his limbs, for his blood had turned to water in the presence of the champion of the Hebrew people. So, being afraid to risk the battle, he lay still and cursed under his breath; but the curses sat very lightly upon Samson, who ate his food with great relish, for Samson had slain a beast and had provided himself with food. When at last he moved away to continue his search for Jair, then the Gileadite crawled from the bushes like a jackal and picked up the broken meat that Samson had left, and ate it. Then it came into his mind that if he followed behind Samson at a safe distance, that Samson would never be able to fall upon him. This he did day by day, hiding in holes or in trees, creeping

upon his belly like a snake, or going upon all-fours like a beast of the hills; and he was glad to pick up that food which Samson wasted. Sometimes when the great Hebrew slew a beast, he would take only the better parts and leave the rest, and from the carcass Jair tore that which he needed.

At last Samson gave up the quest in the hills, and set his face towards the City of Sanctuary; and Jair followed him, walking in his very footsteps; and Samson was a shield to Jair from the great cats that swarmed in that region, though he himself knew it not. Right up to the gates of the city Jair followed Samson, and the watchmen marvelled to see one so small running behind one of so great stature who carried a spear. But when they had entered the gates of the city, then Jair sped hot-foot down a byway, and ran with all his speed until he came to the temple, and he cast himself down before the altar; and the priest stood between him and the entrance to the temple.

When Samson reached the temple and saw the priest barring the way, he laid down his spear and said, "Let me look upon him who hath claimed

sanctuary, that I may know if it is indeed he whom I seek." Then Jair, standing close to the priest, said, "It is indeed the man whom thou did'st seek." Then, knowing that no danger could come to him, he vaunted, saying, "Thou shouldst go back and lay an offering upon the altar where thou livest, Samson, an offering of thanksgiving; for if I had not lost my spear I would have slain thee." And this speech vexed Samson, who cried, "Come out of the city now, and bring a spear with thee, thou boaster!" But Jair raised his eyes and his hands towards heaven, and said, "Not so, Samson, I will not slay thee, though thou hast sought my life these many times. I could have had thy life whilst thou did'st sleep upon the way; but I would not take it, because I knew that if I slew thee our people would say, I did it because of my hand-maiden thy wife. Go back now in peace and take her, for I am weary of her; she was but the desire of an idle moment. Go, Samson, thou hast my blessing to cheer thee upon the way."

At that Samson dissembled his wrath, smiling back at Jair, and saying, "Even so, as thou sayest, it shall be; I will take thy blessing, and depart. But wilt thou not come with me a little way to

cheer me on my journey." But Jair made answer, saying, "Of a truth, Samson, I would go with thee to cheer thee, but that I fear an evil spirit might tempt me to lift my hand against thee." At that speech Samson was beside himself with wrath. "Come forth beyond the gates," he cried, "and as my soul liveth I will take thee by the beard and tear thy jaws asunder." Then Jair pitied him with his mouth, calling upon him to forsake new wine and evil ways. "Go home to thy wife, Samson, and tell her that though her father gave her to me to be my handmaiden, yet I command her now to return to thee; say also unto the woman that though her lips were as sweet as wild honey upon my lips, yet will a man grow weary of too much sweetness."

That night Samson started back upon his homeward way, for he had planned vengeance upon all the people who dwelt under the shadow of his father-in-law's protection. And when he arrived at the house that had been Jair's he met the crippled woman, wife to the Gileadite, and told her all that had come to pass; and she took him in, and washed his feet, and gave him a change of raiment, and sweet-smelling ointment fragrant

with rare perfumes for his hair and beard. And she waited upon him herself, and would allow no servant to come unto him.

And when Samson was rested, and had eaten of a kid stuffed with olives, and had drunk of the best that was in her house, she said, "Tell me, now, I pray thee, my lord, what is in thy heart to do?" And Samson said, "I have not yet made up my mind." And the woman said, "Do as thou didst in the Valley of Ashkelon, go down and harry the land, and leave the rest to me." So when he had rested a few days, Samson went to his own people and gathered a band of men who knew him and understood his wrongs, and they went down and harried the lands of the Philistines. And it was the time of harvest; the grain stood ripe in the fields, and Samson and his band burned it where it stood, so that the people were filled with wrath, and a great host of them came out in search of the harriers. But Samson and those who were with him fled quickly and returned to their own homes. And word came to the cripple, the wife of Jair, that the people were seeking vengeance for the evil done to them, and she sent a fleet messenger to the leader of the

host of the Philistines, saying, "Come to me, and I can tell thee where to lay thy hands upon the cause of all thy trouble." And when the leader had come to her, she said, "Samson the Hebrew hath done this thing; yet there are those of our own people who are more guilty than he." And when the Philistines gathered round her, seeking to know what she meant by her dark sayings, she told them that Samson had married a daughter of Philistia whom he had loved with a great love; but the woman was unworthy, and her lord had departed from her in anger. Then her father had taken as a bribe a vineyard and a field of olives, and had given Samson's bride to another to be his handmaiden, therefore had Samson risen to smite the Philistines. When the Philistines heard that, they cried with one voice, "She shall surely die, she and her father; they shall be burned with fire." And they made haste to carry out what they decreed.

When Samson's wife saw the people surrounding her father's house to burn it, she cried, "Is there no woman amongst you all, is there not a woman with whom I can have speech?" Then Jair's wife called aloud, crying, "I am a woman; wouldst

thou have speech with me?" And the beautiful Timnite abased herself before the cripple, and begged her to save her life, saying, "I am too young and too beautiful to die; plead for me, I beseech thee." Then Jair's wife made answer, saying, "How can I save thee? I am a childless woman who hath no husband in the land." But the Timnite cried the more, "Plead for me or I perish." And again the cripple said, "How shall I plead for thee with the men, I who am a cripple and hunchbacked, a withered leaf and a crooked bough? Go thou and dance before them in all thy beauty. I was a wife; thy hand made me a widow. I was a cripple; thy mouth made me a byword in the land. How then should I plead for thee?" Then the Timnite saw that there was no hope for her, and she bowed herself and died, she and all her father's house who dwelt in that spot. And Samson abode with his own people, whilst Jair remained in the City of Sanctuary, and knew not that his handmaiden had perished with all her house.

After a little time news reached Samson concerning the destruction of his wife by her own people, and it angered him so that he made up

his mind to have vengeance for that deed. He waited until there was a feast of their people ; then he and his band sallied forth, and, taking the enemy at a disadvantage, he smote them hip and thigh, until the countryside was filled with the moans of widowed women and the wailing of little children who were left fatherless ; and no man was hated in all the land with so great an hatred as Samson.

CHAPTER V

IN THE VALLEY OF SOREK

THE Valley of Sorek, in the land of Philistia, lay far from Judah. It was a valley overshadowed by the mantle of peace. The smile of the Great Giver lay upon that little spot of earth. Waters rose from the ground in gushing springs sparkling like liquid diamonds; beautiful groves of trees, chosen for their luxuriant loveliness, formed temples of shade where the weary might rest and find shelter from the sun. The sloping sides of the valley were covered with fruit trees, vineyards, and olive gardens; wild flowers mingled with the deep grass that flourished everywhere. Houses with white walls and flat roofs—half hidden, half revealed, amid the foliage—broke the sameness which otherwise might have tired the eye. Cattle, sheep, and goats dreamed their lives away in the meadow lands that lay beneath the hill-

sides, whilst down the centre of the valley great fields of golden corn ripened in the sun. A broad, peaceful stream ran languorously down the very heart of the cornland, glittering in the daylight like a warrior's sword unstained by battle. The cornfields were divided by hedges of pomegranate trees, dark green flaked with crimson. It was a fair spot, too fair to be sullied by the feet of marching men, too joyous to bear the rude shock of war. In one of the cornfields a woman stood idly, for no taskmaster's eye was upon her. Tall and straight as a spear shaft, her small head sat upon her neck like a hawk upon a pine. She had uncoiled her hair, and the black cloud of its imperial beauty fell almost to her feet. A simple garment of white, fastened at the waist by a girdle, made up her dress. Her feet were bare. Her arms from the very shoulders were guileless of covering. She wore no ornaments, yet, as she looked into the unruffled surface of the river, she knew that she was one to be desired by any of the sons of men. A bundle of newly-cut corn lay just behind; she turned and pushed it petulantly with her foot. Then her eye fell upon a cluster of glorious crimson flowers in the pomegranate

hedge upon her left hand. She stepped towards it, and plucking the flowers, twined them in her hair with swift and skilful fingers; then once more she turned towards the river, and looking into the water saw herself, and smiled at what she saw. The picture was passing fair! The maid waiting for womanhood, the silver river at her feet, the golden corn behind her, the mingled green and crimson of the pomegranate border beside her, the blue heavens curtained with creamy clouds above her. Yet with all its loveliness the scene was incomplete. Birds sang from the hedges, a hawk swept low over the corn, the maid plucked thick waxen petals from a blood-red flower in her hand, and cast them one by one into the drifting water.

Then, all at once, the picture was finished. Nature completed her masterpiece. A man entered the field, walked down the little path that lay between the growing corn and the sentinel hedge, and paused just behind the maid. Nothing else had happened, yet the whole picture had undergone a change, the whole scene harmonised. The maid turning her head saw the man; she did not drop her eyes and seek to hide her face, but looked at him as a doe looks at a stag when



THE PICTURE WAS PASSING FAIR

they meet on the mountains. And he, seeing the challenge in her eyes, moved towards her until, standing close to her, he smiled down into eyes that answered him with mirth. So Samson and Delilah met; and he, the strongest man amongst the sons of men, became as a rope of sand in the hands of a damsel. Yet she knew not who he was, for in the peaceful Valley of Sorek there were none who knew the Hebrew champion. As for him, he said, "I will win her, as a great captain wins a strong city; and when I have won her I will wed her before all men, and there shall be peace and no more shedding of blood between my people and her people. Yet will I not tell her that I am Samson, lest she hate me for the blood that I have spilled." So he told her that he was one who dwelt in a far country, travelling to see the wonders of the land of Philistia. And Delilah asked him, "Art thou not fearful lest in a strange land some who are evilly disposed towards strangers may fall upon thee?"

When the man heard that saying he stretched out his limbs before the woman, showing the might of his great body; and when she had feasted her eyes upon him, he said, "Do I look

like one who is easily affrighted? Am I a stripling, that every brawling fellow who sees me should seek to push a quarrel upon me? In peace I came and in peace I will go, when the time for going is ripe; but they who strive to break in upon my peace will find that there is more danger in the quiet water than in the babbling brook."

And Delilah, looking upon him, said to her own soul, "This is indeed a man; one whom I could love with all my heart, for he is to all other men whom I have seen as a young bull, snow-white and untamed, is to the oxen that are used to the yoke. Yet do I know that he has not told me all his heart, for I know of a surety that he is not one of those who travel from a far country with merchandise to barter; weapons of war sit too easily in his hand for one who has lived a life of peace. When he has won my love, he may go as he came, and the damsels will mock me, yet will I match my beauty against his strength." So she dallied with Samson until, in the strength of his love for her, he thought that all the strength and the heat of summer had got into his blood, so that when one came to him from his own people, and said, "Why will you tarry here where danger may

come upon you like a bear from the hills? return, I pray thee, with me, for the maidens in Judah are sad because you are not near them to cheer their eyes," Samson would not hearken to the pleadings of the messenger, but said, "If all the armies of my enemies were drawing a circle around me, yet would I not leave the Valley of Sorek and the damsel Delilah. Is she not the light of my life, and if I lose the light what is my life worth? I will have her, though I die to win her. She is a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed; there is none other like her, no not one! Shall I leave her to the Philistines, to be wife to one of these whose blood is not fit to stain my spear point? Go now, and leave me, I will plough my furrow alone."

And the man went, and tarried not, for when Samson said "I would be alone," the Hebrew knew that there was not room for more than one. So Samson went, and finding the damsel alone, making a garland of flowers, he sat down beside her and told her of his love; and she, because of the youth that was in her, and because of the splendour of his manhood, let her head lie upon his breast. And when he put his lips to hers,

as a thirsty man puts his lips to wine, she unbound her hair and twined it round his neck and knotted it behind his head, saying, "Now, indeed, thou strong man, thou canst not leave me for the maids to mock at me, for with a thread of her hair a damsel can hold a man, if he loves her."

And he replied, saying, "Thou knowest that my heart is under thy hand, do with it as seemeth good in thy sight."

Then she said, "Is it true thou lovest me, or is it that the summer days are heavy on thy hands with idleness?"

But he only made sport of her. Then she, pressing his head-down in her lap, made a crown of flowers and crowned him, and taking his hair in her hands she plaited it with her own, saying, "Now, indeed, thou art my captive. Tell me, if there is any love in thy heart for me, what is thy name, where is thy country, and what brought thee to this Valley of Sorek? for I see plainly that thou hast lied to me; thou art not a trader in spices, but a warrior. Art thou a king? and hast thou come here to spy out the fatness of the land?" And he was partly minded to tell her the truth, but said, "Already I have told thee,

and thou hast not believed me. I am a trader from a far country, and it was chance that brought me to this Valley of Sorek."

Then he fell asleep with his head in her lap, whilst she toyed with the silken masses of his beard that fell upon his chest. And when he awoke he was troubled, for he said, "I have dreamed a dream, Delilah, and it vexes me." Whereupon the damsel laughed, tormenting him to tell her his dream.

So Samson said, "I dreamed that it was the season of grapes and the making of wine. I saw thee in the wine-press, and thy feet were stained red, and I looked over the wine-press, and at the bottom I saw mine own body, all torn and mangled; and thy feet, Delilah, were upon my wounds, trampling them; and it was my blood, and not the blood of grapes, that had stained thy white feet red. Canst thou interpret my dream for me, Delilah?" And she answered him with laughter, saying, "Come up with me to-morrow, and I will answer it, for to-morrow we press the grapes with our feet to make the wine. The young children are even now plucking the ripe fruit; it was their songs which the wind brought

to thine ears that made thee dream of wine, and the memory of battles that made thee dream of blood; for I know well, in spite of what thou would'st conceal from me, that the ways of war are familiar to thee."

On the day following, Samson went up to watch the damsels press the juice from the grapes with their bare feet, and many of them were very fair to look upon, but none were to be compared with Delilah. When the harvest of grapes was past, the men who dwelt in the Valley of Sorek made a feast, according to their custom, and after the feast there was dancing and merriment, and Delilah danced before Samson; but he had more pleasure in the damsel when the moon had arisen and he walked with her on the banks of the river and talked to her of love. Then it was that he made her sing to him, and her voice was so sweet that the night-birds, sweetest of all song-birds, ceased their singing to listen to her. And when she saw that his heart was melted by her singing, she caught the silken masses of his beard in her two hands and drew his head down towards her and kissed him upon the throat, saying, "Now, my lord, tell me truly what is thy

name? and thy country, where is it?" For the maidens had mocked her at the feast, crying, "Who then is thy lover? Canst thou not even find a name for him?" But Samson said, "It is an old tale, I have told it thee these many times already; when thou art my wife, then I will put a girdle of spears around thee." Then Delilah was sure in her own heart that he was not a trader, but a warrior; and she brooded over this matter, for it came into her mind that he only sported with her, and would go and leave her to be a byword amongst her own kindred. Yet, in spite of her fears, she loved him on account of his kingly appearance, for all other men looked common and of no account when he was standing amongst them; and it was the desire of Delilah's life to become wife to Samson.

On the day following the feast, the elders of the people in the Valley of Sorek invited Samson, because he was a stranger, to join in their amusements, and he consented, for it was in his heart to please them in all things. So the elders handed him over to the young men, and they took him with them to the river to join in the

sport of fishing. The young men of Sorek had many birds captured in the swamps that lay beyond the valley, and these birds lived upon fish which they caught. When the fishermen desired to use them to catch fish for them, they fastened a narrow thong of green hide round the neck of the birds and let them wade in the river; and when the birds caught a fish and tried to swallow it, the fish stuck in the throat of the bird because of the thong of green hide which would not allow the neck to expand; and the sportsmen took the fish from the birds and placed them in a basket which the damsels carried upon the bank.

When Samson saw the birds fishing for the young men of Sorek, he laughed, for it seemed to him sport fit only for women and boys, and not for grown men. When they saw that he laughed, they asked him if he could show them a better way, and he said, "Lend me, I pray thee, a spear, and I will show how the young men in my country hunt the waters." So they lent him a spear, and he stripped himself of all that he wore excepting a girdle about his loins, and he swam out into the river where the

water was deep and strong, and climbed upon a flat rock around which the river circled. And, when he had examined the waters carefully, he drew himself up to his full height; the spear was poised in his right hand ready for instant hurling; his left foot was thrown forward in advance of his body, just touching the rock lightly; all the weight of his body was upon his right foot, which lay flat upon the rock. His beard, wet with the waters of the river, fell in silky waves down his chest, whilst his yellow hair, in a blaze of tangled curls, swept over his back; his head was drooped slightly forward, so that his eyes could search the waters for fish. So great was his beauty as he stood thus that all the young men of Sorek cried, "Surely this cannot be a man even as we are. He must be a god." But Delilah mocked them, saying, "Do the gods seek the daughters of men to make love to them in the cornfields. He is not a god. He is a man, for I have felt his breath upon my cheek, and his hand hath rested in mine in the moonlight. If he is a god, then the wooing of the gods is near akin to the wooing of men; and the gods can lie to

their lovers as well as the young men of Sorek."

For a long time Samson stood with the sunshine playing upon his head and the waters flirting with his feet, and no muscle of his body even quivered. All at once the spear left his hand like a streak of flame and was buried in the waters, and when he drew it forth there was a great fish, pierced through the body, transfixed by the spear. When he held it aloft for the people to see, they shouted with delight. For hours Samson stood and fished for the dwellers in Sorek, until the face of the rock where he stood was covered with the fruits of his skill. Like a hawk poised, he stood, until he saw plainly what he sought; then, swifter than a hawk strikes at water-fowl, he struck. When he had grown weary of his pastime he beckoned to the damsels, and they, shouting and laughing with glee, swam out with their baskets and gathered in the spoil. And the people were all overjoyed with Samson, and pressed him to stay and dwell with them. The damsels made garlands of flowers and crowned him king of the valley, and many envied Delilah the love of Samson. That evening they spread

a feast for him in the starlight amongst the olive trees, and the maidens who attended upon the men covered their hair with nets of finest silk, woven from the web spun in the mulberry groves by the white caterpillars; inside the nets they placed night-flies, that sparkled in the dusky shadows like living fire; and when the damsels wandered away amidst the trees, the young men saw them and pursued them with much merriment. And Samson said to his beloved, "This Valley of Sorek leaves little for the heart of man to desire; if it might be so, I would spend the rest of my days here in peace." And Delilah said, "What is it that hinders my lord, if the wish is in his heart and not upon his lips only? Is there a woman in the land where thy home is whose face is dearer to thee than any that are to be found in our valley?" Then Samson, picking her up in his arms, kissed her upon the eyes and throat and bosom, and swore a vow to her that she should be his wife before he left the Valley of Sorek. And Delilah was happy; she shook the fireflies from her hair and roamed with him wherever he chose to lead her. And the next day the maidens cried to her, "Tell

us, Delilah, when is the wedding feast to be?" And she, being light-hearted, said, "When my lord bids thee to the feast, then make ready; there is no need for haste." But an old woman, hearing her speech, said, "When a man talks marriage, a maid should not talk of delay; for a bank of sand to a running river is not more unstable than the heart of a man when maids are yielding."

It came about, as time passed on, that Samson spoke of hunting, asking the people if there was nothing in the land that a man might try his skill upon. And they left their labours and made a hunt for him. The chief huntsman and his six sons brought each a great cat; a band was placed around the neck of each beast, to which two long thongs were fastened in a running loop, and the men held on to each thong; a leathern screen was fastened to the necklace, so that it fell like a hood over the eyes of the cat, for they were very fierce and would turn and rend their keepers if their anger was aroused. When Samson saw the great cats, he said, "Are we to hunt these animals? if so, we shall have a royal day. I have hunted them in my own

country; they are fiercer than a lion and harder to slay than a lion, because they are so full of craft." The chief huntsman replied, "Every country has its own customs, let my lord wait and see how we use these fierce cats for our own pleasure."

The people moved across the valley towards the hills, and when they had crossed the inner circle of hills they came to a level plain where herds of wild animals, in shape like an ass but marked with bands like the greatest of the great cat tribe, were feeding. Then the chief huntsman slipped the leash from one of the cats, and placing his legs astride the animal's back, so that his whole body was behind it, he with care pointed its head towards a herd that was feeding in the open country, holding the cat by the ears for a short space of time; then he swiftly lifted the hood from the cat's eyes and sprang backwards. For a moment the savage animal stood blinking in the glare of the sun, lashing its sides with its tail, and making a sound like running water on rocky ground; then it fixed its eyes upon the quarry afar off. For a moment the body became rigid, the tail pointing straight out behind the backbone;

there was no movement except the twitching of the white bristles around the mouth. Then the beast crouched until its belly rustled amidst the grass; the jaws were sunk between the extended paws; swiftly it moved away into a patch of deep grass, never going into the uncovered ground, now almost circling the herd, now moving in upon its prey, picking every piece of broken ground with unerring instinct. When one of the herd moved uneasily, the vast cat extended itself to its utmost length and lay motionless. Yard by yard, foot by foot, inch by inch it drew closer and closer, until the outermost animal was within its reach; then, without noise, without effort, it launched itself through space, and buried claws and jaws in the neck of the terror-stricken beast and bore it to the ground. The smitten animal struggled wildly, kicking and pawing in mad despair. The great cat never moved, only its tail waved from side to side as it drank in a rich, hot stream—the blood of its victim. The chief huntsman waited until the brute had almost gorged itself with warm blood; then he approached warily from behind and passed the screen over the fiercely gleaming eyes, and placed the guiding hide-thongs through the neck-

lace. His servants came to his aid, and took hold of the leash ; but even then they dared not drag the monster from its hold, but stood patiently by until when glutted the animal raised its dripping jaw and snarled ; then they dragged it, growling, from the still quivering carcass and led it home.

All day the men of Sorek followed the chase, and Samson was growing weary ; for the sport had not enough of the salt of danger in it to charm him long. When, at evening, the last cat was slipped from its mask by the chief huntsman's son, the youth was not quick enough in his backward spring, and the creature, turning upon him, buried its jaws in his neck. Then Samson, thrusting one arm beneath its belly and the other across its back, broke ribs and backbone with one effort of his great strength, and threw the carcass from him disdainfully, so that the men of Sorek drew apart from him, for they feared him ; and they whispered amongst themselves, " What manner of man is this who can slay these fierce animals with his hands as though they were goats ? If he is a man at all he is possessed ; let us hasten home and offer sacrifice to our god Dagon, lest an evil thing come to us." Only Delilah clave to Samson.

And when he saw that the people were afraid of him, his anger was kindled against them. "What have I done," he asked of the damsel, "that thy people should fear me? Have I wronged any man, have I smitten any man? All that I did was to save one of thy people from the jaws of a beast, and now they hate me." And he said, "I will go to my own country and to my own people—they will not hate me." But Delilah would not let him go, saying, "If thou goest from me now, what am I? Who amongst the young men of mine own people will count me worthy?" So Samson stayed. But his heart was no longer with the men of Sorek, and he no longer wanted to take a wife from amongst them because he despised them.

And it came about that the people met continuously in the groves dedicated to their god Dagon, and talked with the priests concerning Samson. And the priests stirred the common people against him, saying that he was an enemy come to spy out the land, and that Dagon had revealed it unto them, and urged them to kill him. But the father of the man whom Samson had saved from the great cat, came to him by

night and warned him. Then Samson rose up and departed from the Valley of Sorek.

And when the people found that he was indeed gone from amongst them they mocked Delilah, crying, "Who is so beautiful as thou, O daughter of Semlik? Who of all the women of Philistia can charm the hearts of strangers as thou canst? Wanton one, where is he who was to have been thy husband? O frail one, go find him that he may bid us to the marriage feast, for our hearts are merry and we would dance at thy wedding." So from that day she who was the fairest amongst women in all the Valley of Sorek became a jest upon the tongues of the people; and no young man came nigh unto her excepting by stealth in the night-time; and the love that she had borne for Samson turned to gall in her bosom. Yet she braided her hair every morning, and kept herself fairest amongst women, for she said, "Some day he will surely come again, then may Dagon help me to undo him; for if he had loved me he would surely have taken me with him and not have left me here to be the sport of fools." Every morning she stood in the doorway of her house and shaded her eyes with her hands, looking down the valley

for Samson. Every evening as the sun was sinking she walked by the river in the cornfield where she had first met her love, and the children mocked her, saying, "Lo, here is the bride, and the bride's guests, but where, O daughter of Philistia, is the bridegroom?"

CHAPTER VI

THE RETURN FROM THE CITY OF SANCTUARY

AFTER the departure of Samson from the City of Sanctuary, Jair the Gileadite sat himself down to make life as pleasant for himself as such a life might be. The jewels he had brought with him made his pathway smooth, and he became a man of some importance in that city of man-slayers, for even in such a community the possession of wealth was the possession of power.

The citizens who, when amongst their own kindred, had been the most lawless of men, became in the City of Sanctuary the strictest of law-makers and the most stringent observers of the law, for they knew that without law no man was safe. They were a law unto themselves in the city, yet without the walls they themselves

were powerless. Every year they elected twelve men who ruled all the city excepting the temple ; there the priests reigned supreme and had dominion. The twelve judges heard all complaints and settled all disputes. When it came about that a man possessing a turbulent spirit refused to obey the ruling of the judges, then the twelve called the whole city about them and laid the man's iniquity before them, and demanded of the people that they should thrust him forth from the city to be at the mercy of his enemies ; and that person could no more enter the city to live there. If he returned, the people rose up and stoned him to death. But if a man left the city of his own accord he might return to it at any time, providing he fell not into the hands of those who sought his blood. Outside the city, distant as far as a slinger might cast a stone in two casts, there were many isolated camps whose occupiers watched the gates night and day. These were the camps of avengers of blood, whose hatred for the men upon the inside of the city slumbered not nor slept ; some of them remained there for years, hoping that the refugee might grow weary of the city and try to escape ;

and when he made the attempt, they fell upon him and slew him. Amongst the avengers there were men with long white beards and white hair, who had been youths when they first pitched their tents outside the city. To them every sound in the city was a sign; they knew every note of joy or sorrow, when a man arrived or one was expelled. When it came about that one was thrust forth, they hastened towards him with their weapons in their hands, and peered keenly into his face to see if it was the man they sought; each man did this in his turn, whilst the cowering wretch shrank back from each fresh face that searched his own with eyes full of the fire of undying hate. As each of the avengers found that the man was not the one he sought, he walked back to his tent of untanned hide, and did not molest the fugitive; but help of any sort, even to a cup of water or a bandage for a bleeding wound, they would not give him. Even though his life depended upon the lifting of a finger not one of them would stir even a sinew, for there was an unending hate between the men on the inside and the men on the outside of the walls. As for the people within the city, they

jealously guarded what was their right. It was written that no avenger might linger within two stone-throws of the walls. If the watchmen upon the walls saw one of the man-hunters within the prescribed circle, he would take his sling forthwith and cast a stone at the trespasser; and those men who practised with the sling all day long were very deadly.

For a long time Jair dwelt in peace in sanctuary, but he was careful not to live a slothful life and become fat and unwieldy. Day by day he took his place with the watchers upon the walls, and he too practised with the sling continually, hoping to be able to slay Samson, for he knew not that Samson had returned to his own people. Every day, also, he strained his eyes, hoping to see the beautiful Timnite coming to join him, for he had not heard how she had perished by the hands of the Philistines. It was gall and wormwood to his soul to find that she came not, for he counted her false to him as she had been false to her own husband; for Jair, who was faithless to everyone, believed not in the constancy of anyone towards anything. So he suffered, blaming

even the dead; for the wickedness of the wicked becomes a whip wherewith they flog themselves.

One day a rumour ran through the city that a caravan guarded by armed servants was approaching the city, and everyone crowded to the walls to watch, and the excitement was very great. When the caravan came within bowshot of the gates it halted, the dromedaries kneeled down and were unpacked of their burdens. Then a woman was lifted upon the back of an ass, an armed guard surrounded her, and the little party moved towards the gate. There was a great throng within, waiting to see the woman, but her face was closely veiled. And the keeper of the gate asked the woman whom she sought, and she replied, "I have come from afar to seek Jair the Gileadite, whose blood Samson of Judah seeketh." And the news was passed on from mouth to mouth until it reached Jair, where he stood with the watchmen upon the walls. Then Jair said, "It is my handmaiden come to seek me." And he boasted to those who stood with him, saying, "Now I will show you one whose face is fairer than the dawning; when she walks

she is like a roe upon a mountain in springtime, her form is as straight as a young cedar, her lips are as threads of scarlet. I have seen none to compare with her in all my wanderings." And these words of Jair ran from the mouth of one man to the mouth of another, until the whole city was filled with the story of the woman's beauty. And they made a lane for Jair through their ranks so that he might hasten to his beloved, who had dared the perils of the wilderness to come to him in his loneliness. And Jair, as he passed through the press of the people, tossed his head haughtily, and minced as he walked, for he was proud as if he had conquered a city. When the woman saw him, she dismounted from her ass, and, stretching forth her arms, limped painfully towards him. And a great wrath filled the soul of Jair when he beheld the limping gait and the humpback of the woman! He turned from her in disgust, saying aloud, "Who is this woman? I know her not." Then the woman, throwing back her veil, cried, "Turn not from me, I beseech thee, my lord; am not I thy wife." And a great silence fell upon the people, for they saw not her deformity, saw not her uncomeliness; all

that they saw was a woman's love shining from a woman's face, and many amongst them wept; only Jair saw nothing of the beauty of self-sacrifice. Turning to one of his servants, he said, "Take this woman to my home, and see that she does not cross the threshold again in the daytime." And some of those standing by would have stoned him, but that he entered a house near by and was hidden from them. From that hour he was a man despised even by the man-slayers in the city. As for his wife, her heart yearned towards him, as is the way with some women; the more he was despised by his fellow-refugees, the more she clave to him, and she was his only comforter. And it came about that once, when she was alone with him, she told him how the wife of Samson had been burned by her own people because of the trouble she had brought upon them. And he asked her concerning Samson, and she answered that Samson had returned to dwell amongst his own people; for so she believed, for it was unknown to her that he had gone to the Valley of Sorek.

From that time forth Jair brooded over his captivity and planned how he might escape.

His wife had brought most of her wealth with her in jewels; and it was in Jair's heart to take all that she had, and fly, for his soul yearned for the flesh-pots of Philistia. And it came to pass even as he had planned. One night he secreted all the precious stones belonging to his wife in a leathern bag and walked out of the City of Sanctuary. And it so happened that, whilst he crept like a thief of the night through the city, his wife was outside the temple praying for him. She could not enter the temple because she was a Gentile, and none but Hebrews were counted worthy to cross the sacred threshold; so she who knew not the God of Israel, knelt within the shadow of His holy shrine and prayed the unknown God, who was her husband's God of old time, to bring peace to the bruised soul of her lord. All night long she prayed, cutting her knees upon the stones where she knelt; and when it was morning she offered up a prayer to her own god Dagon, for she feared that the God of the Hebrews might not hearken to her petitions.

Then she returned home and found that her husband had fled and taken all her treasures with him; so she sat down and wept, and none could

comfort her. When the people heard what he had done, they called the twelve judges together, and one stood up and accused Jair of having contaminated the sanctuary; and the judges, when they heard the charge, issued this decree to the people: "Whereas Jair had defiled the sanctuary, the gates thereof were to be closed to him for ever. Should he enter the city by stealth, or in defiance of the wish of the people, he was to be stoned to death, and his body to be thrown from the walls to be food for the birds of prey." Yet none of these things brought joy to the soul of the cripple; she put ashes upon her head and mourned for her husband as for one already dead. And when the people saw how she grieved, the city adopted her, and she was fed and clothed by the bounty of men who were outlaws and outcasts, because to them she was the symbol of true love and unsleeping faithfulness. And a measure of happiness came to her, and she said, "I am a ewe lost upon the mountains, and lo, the eagles do feed me, and the lions cease to roar in my pathway."

None of these things troubled Jair. Good fortune seemed to smile upon him, robbers did

not molest him, neither did the wild beasts rend him; when he came to the rivers the fords were passable, and the time of year was pleasant for travelling. He had taken a spear and a sword with him when he had stolen out of the city, and in his pouch was a bundle of sinews, drawn from the legs of asses, which he had brought to make a sling for himself; and this he did when he had snared a fox, from the skin of the fox he made the pouch of his sling and a scrip to carry pebbles. When he had made his sling, he gathered four-and-twenty pebbles, smooth and round, from a brook, and placed them in his scrip. And as he walked, he practised casting stones at birds upon the wing, until he could make certain of hitting a raven in full flight once in three casts. Then he was satisfied, saying to himself, that if he met Samson he would lay in wait for him and kill him, and so earn the goodwill of the Philistines.

Yet in spite of these things he did not go near his old home, but made a wide circuit which took him into the City of Tibhath, which was a walled town where traders from near and far came to barter their wares in the market-place; and no

one noticed the incoming of a stranger alone and on foot ; yet when he had passed out of the press of people near the gate and moved near the market-place, where the footway was wider, many men turned to look at him, for he was good to see, being lithe and tall. His frugal living and his constant marching had brought back all his old elasticity of step, so that he now walked with the spring and ease of a wild horse ; his beard he had allowed to grow, which of old time he had kept shorn ; his cheeks were thin and bronzed ; his black eyes, large and full, were keen and piercing ; his nose, hooked and lean, was like the beak of a great hawk ; his teeth, behind the jetty blackness of the hair which fringed his full red lips, were white as milk.

He made pretence not to notice the gaze of the men who turned to look upon him, but made his way steadily through the people until he came to a stall where one sat who bartered in precious stones. When the trader saw Jair pause before his stall he rose and looked keenly at him. He was an old man, meanly dressed ; his hair was white as winter and fell from the edges of a small cap of black wool down his shrunken shoulders ;

his hands were lean, the fingers hooked like the talons of a bird of prey, each bent claw seemed to speak of a lifetime spent in grasping gold. A slave stood close to the stall; and an ass, old, lean, and miserable to look upon, picked up wandering wisps of fodder which the wind blew towards it, thrusting out its long upper lip to secure vagrant pieces of dry grass with a skill born of long practice. A little knot of idlers gathered round the stall, for the old man was reputed to possess many rare gems which none but the wealthiest might look upon. When Jair saw the idlers, he bent over the stall as if to look at a knife, the handle of which was cunningly wrought; and he said to the trader, "There is a matter concerning which I would speak with thee, but it must not be in the market-place; is there no spot where we can talk in secret?" The trader made answer, saying, "Move slowly on, and my slave shall follow thee and speak with thee." Then, lifting his voice so that all might hear him, he praised the knife which Jair was examining, swearing that it possessed virtues which no other blade had ever been known to possess; and, as the crowd of idlers pressed near, he asked a great price for

it, whereupon Jair tossed the blade down contemptuously, declaring that the women in his country used better blades in their tents. The crowd laughed and applauded him, but the trader called the gods to witness that the stranger lied. Then as Jair moved off he called after him, offering the knife for half the sum he had asked at first, but Jair only lifted his shoulders and pushed slowly through the people. The trader raised his voice shrilly and called a much lower sum; and again the people made merry, so that the old man tore his hair, and turning to his slave, said, "Run after the young man, and say he shall have the blade almost as a gift, for this is the first day of my dealing for this season in the market, and if I do not strike a bargain with him, evil will follow me during the whole of my sojourn here." So the slave rose up and went after Jair, and plucked him by the arm, for he knew the ways of his master and why he had been sent after the stranger.

When Jair saw who it was that had plucked him by the arm he made pretence to be angry, and dealt the slave a buffet with his palm, so that the people seeing it made very merry, and went

each man upon his own errand. When the slave saw that the onlookers no longer busied themselves with him, he again approached Jair, and plucked him by the arm; and Jair said, "What is thy errand?" And the slave replied, "Go thou to the turning that is on thy left hand, and at the third house on the right side of the way pause until the door is unbolted; then, if thou art an honest man, desirous of trade, go thou in and fear not; but if thou art a robber, tarry outside, for there are those within who can defend what belongs to my lord." And without another word he turned and went his way back to his master.

When the old man saw him he began to revile him, telling him to pack up the goods for he would not tempt fortune again that day. All the time the slave was loading the ass, the old man was heaping reproaches upon his servant for having allowed the stranger to depart without trading, so that those who were within hearing pitied the slave. When the ass had its full burden, the trader moved off by a narrow way, and went to his own dwelling. When he was inside he looked through a slit in the wall, pre-

pared for the purpose, until his eyes fell upon Jair, who was standing in front of a long, low, squarely built house, which was a common place of call for travellers. There a man might get food and a resting - place for himself, or for his asses or camels, for he who kept it was one of those who provide for the wants of wayfarers—at a price; asking not of any man what his business might be or whence he came, providing he had money to pay for that which he needed. The place was surrounded by a sort of outer wall, with doorways which had no doors; inside there was an open court, with a well in the middle, where men of many colours sat and rested. There was much noise in the court, for some had brought asses or horses with them, others had goats and camels; some of the men carried weapons of war, and looked around them with fierce, proud glances, eyeing the mere traders disdainfully, as is the way with men who live by war; whilst the traders quietly attended to their beasts and took no note of the haughty glances of the others. All these things Jair could see from his position on the outside, for he was standing in front of one of the doorways. He saw the place was full to

overflowing, for not only was the courtyard full of people who had but lately arrived, but the stables, which were meant for the beasts, were thronged with women and children who lay upon bundles of straw or sat cross-legged, with hands in their laps, talking with each other, exchanging the news, or telling tales concerning the countries they came from. And this angered Jair, because he had intended to seek a lodging there after he had fulfilled his mission with the dealer in precious stones.

As he stood debating the matter, the dealer, with his servant, was watching him from a place of vantage, but they could not agree concerning him. "He is one of those who have come to the King's feasts to try for the spoils," said the servant; "see how lean he is, and yet how strong."

"Thou art full of thy folly," answered his master, "if he were one of those what would he want with me? Those men never buy precious stones; if they covet a thing they get it by violence, or steal it when the owner is full of wine. Besides, this one hath not the look of men of that kind; he standeth close against the wall and giveth those that pass plenty of room, whereas those whose

business it is to strive for prizes, do they not always stand in the middle of the path, and make better men who would avoid a brawl walk in the filth of the highway." "He is not of the merchant class," said the servant; "his bearing is too independent for a servant or a slave, yet if he were a master and the owner of substance he would not be so lean and full of sinew; perhaps he is one of those who hire themselves out to guard the caravans of merchants from the attacks of robbers." "He is not any of those things," answered the master; "if he were a guardian of other's treasures he would not be walking almost unarmed, for those men part not with their weapons either by night or day, for they know not when they may meet some who have cause to hate them. He looks, to my eyes, like one who waits upon a greater than himself, a man in a high place, serving someone who is too high to serve himself." "Is it then thy wish that I go forth and lead him here?" asked the slave. "Be not over hasty in such matters," replied the master; "if he has that which is of value to sell, he will not depart too quickly; if, on the other hand, he seeketh to buy from me, be sure he

knows what he seeketh, and it is not seemly that we should appear in too great haste to push our treasures under his notice: such doings only cheapen possessions in the eyes of those who seek them. Besides, how dost thou know this man is not a robber, one of those children of evil who live by the strong hand? His comrades may be within the walls of the dwelling against which he standeth." "Now that I come to look closely at him he hath indeed a subtle face; if he were an honest man he would have a servant," said the quaking slave. "Shall I send the dwarf to bid him begone about his business?" "Not so fast, fool," cried the merchant angrily. "One moment thou blowest hot past all bearing, the next thou wouldst freeze the marrow in a man's bones by thy coldness. Go now and tell three of my servants to arm themselves and stand ready to come if I call; and as for the dwarf, let him come to me and bring with him the great cat which he keepeth always in leash, bid him play with the unclean beast, so that when the stranger enters my chamber he will get between the doorway and the man that he may not escape with his plunder if he offers me violence." The slave

went about his errand, and the merchant once more turned to the slit in the wall to watch Jair, to see if he communicated by any sign with those who might be within the courtyard of the house of call. But Jair made no sign, for he knew no man in all the city, neither was he known of any, either man or maid.

So when all was in readiness the merchant sent his slave to bring Jair to him. It did not escape the keen senses of the Hebrew that the door of the house was barred as soon as he entered, nor did he fail to see the armed slaves lurking in the shadows; he had expected those things, for he had mixed much with men who had travelled far and seen many strange sights, but his heart almost failed him when he entered the room where the old merchant sat, and saw the dwarf kneeling upon the floor fondling a great spotted animal of the cat tribe. He saw the great claws cut into the earthen floor as the beast stretched its paws in wantonness, he saw the cruel gleam of the yellow eyes that flamed at him from between two black slits in the velvet hide, saw the white teeth set in the blood-red gums as the creature drew its whiskered

lips up in silent menace at his approach; and the marrow in his bones grew chill. The old man rose and bade him welcome; the dwarf, with a playful gesture, passed to the other end of the chamber, taking his guard with him, and together they squatted in front of the door by which Jair had entered. "We are alone now, my son," said the old man mildly; "the dwarf and his beast will guard us both whilst we do that which thou comest to do. Is it to buy or sell, or to learn a secret, that thou comest? Speak, and fear not. If we agree concerning the matter, then thou shalt go in peace; if we agree not, then also shalt thou go in peace. There is nothing here that an honest man need fear." Then Jair spoke, saying, "I do not fear, for I know thee for a just man; thy fame hath spread far in my country, which is beyond these borders. I heard of thee from many men. The merchants sing thy praises when they encamp amongst our cedar trees, saying one to the other, 'Harder than a rock in the wilderness is Hargon the dealer in precious stones, yea, harder than the flint that is found in the beds of old rivers, but honest is he in all his dealings; silent as the

footfall of a camel in the sands of the desert concerning that which is entrusted to him; slow to strike a bargain as an ass overburdened to climb a hillside, but swift to fulfil his compact when the compact is made: the fame of Hargon the dealer in gems fills the four corners of the earth.' That is why I came to thee alone, and without witnesses, for a man does not undo the work of a lifetime when he is old to gain one advantage that will profit him but little."

When the old trader heard the words of the Hebrew, his heart became as a honeycomb that is pressed by a deft hand, and his breast was full of sweetness. He rose again from his seat and brought forth figs and grapes and a skin full of choice wine, and he bade the dwarf call a servant with water to wash the feet of his visitor; but the dwarf and the great cat he did not remove from the doorway. When Jair had eaten and drunken his fill, then the old man said, "If it seems good unto thee we will talk concerning thy errand, if not we will talk of the weather and of the signs of the times, and thou shalt come again or remain away, as seems good in thine own eyes, for I am thy servant, I and

all that are mine—at a price.” Then Jair, who had long since made up his mind how he would act, drew forth two precious gems and placed them in the old man’s yellow palm, saying, “These are thine to sell to kings or to keep, as seems best unto thee. I brought them from a far country for thee, that thou mightest put all other traders to shame when thou goest into the presence of the mighty. They are thine from this moment if thou wilt have them — at a price.”

The trader took the glittering stones in his palm and turned them towards the light, trying all the time to appear unconcerned, but the keen eyes fixed upon his face saw that he was stirred to his inmost depths, for the gems were rare and of great beauty. After he had examined them with care he handed them back to Jair, but in spite of himself the stones left his hand reluctantly; it would have been as easy for him to have parted with his life-blood as with such treasures. Jair, who noted all these signs, triumphed inwardly, but outwardly he made as if he saw nothing. The trader waited for him to name a price, but he would not, for in such

things Jair was very subtle. So the old man, spreading out his hands and shaking his head, dolefully said, "Between two men who know the rights of a matter what need is there for idle words? The stones are very beautiful, they are good of their kind; if they were only as rare as they are beautiful they would delight the eyes of a king and be worth the price of many fields. But in this country many men possess such stones, for they are found in numbers in the dry beds of ancient rivers, by the wild men who dwell in the desert beyond the mountains which girdle the great King's country."

When Jair heard that saying, he bowed his head meekly; then he opened his mouth, saying, "Of a surety I know that the trader Hargon would not defile his lips with a lie, for the truth is born in him and cometh from his lips like spring water from the ground. In my country these gems are rare and of great price, but here thou sayest they are of small account; therefore they who told me concerning this land knew nothing. I will take my gems back with me whence I came, and confound those who lied unto me"; and he rose as if to depart upon

his errand. But the old man raised his hands and eyes towards heaven, and called upon his gods to bear witness to the rashness and the hot blood of young manhood. "Be seated, my son, and let us reason together," he exclaimed. "Let us do nothing in haste. We are not straws that the wind blows hither and thither at will, but men of substance who look at both sides of a matter as becometh men who have something to lose; only they who have little or nothing to forfeit cast their net at a venture. Drink, my son, to our better understanding; nothing soothes the soul like good wine that a man hath had by him many seasons; and this wine was pressed from the grape when thou wert but a little child, and age has mellowed it, robbing it of its fire yet adding to its richness and strength. Drink, my son, then let us consider the price which I shall give thee for the gems that are thine." Jair filled out two small measures of the precious liquid, and gave one into the hand of the trader, waiting for him to drink, and when the old man saw that his guest drank not, he lifted up his voice in protest, exclaiming, "Drink, my son, that my grey hairs be not dishonoured by thy

doubts, and I will rejoice with thee in thy drinking." But Jair would not. "Who am I," he cried, "that I should drink wine fit for the lips of princes whilst thou who art old and full of wisdom stand by and drink not? It would be a shame unto me and to those that come after me if I did this thing. Young I am in years, and an infant in experience, yet a babe knoweth that it is a dishonour for a young man to drink his fill whilst the greybeards fast. If thou wilt drink, then will I drink also; but if thou wilt have none of it, I too will remain empty."

So they sat and pitted wit against wit like cunning swordsmen, each seeking to find where the other was weaker. At last the old man named a price for the two gems, and called upon his gods to bear him witness that never had he paid so great a price before to mortal man. Jair let him talk on, saying nothing himself, only nodding his head, and smiling as one who is well pleased with a bargain. The old trader smiled through his toothless gums, and cried, "Art thou speechless with wonder, my son? hath my generosity overcome thee? shall we smite hands on our bargain? Of a truth they

who sent thee to me told thee but the half of my goodness; as a fig tree in a thirsty land so am I to those who need me. Give me the stones, my son, and let me weigh out the gold for thee that we may both be full of kindness one towards the other." And again he named the sum he was willing to give, bending his head towards his guest and rolling the fingers of one hand in the palm of the other. Jair replied, with a smile, "Of a truth thou art a just man, even as I had heard, and the sum thou namest is a fair sum, and I will agree to it. Let us smite hands upon our bargain, then thou shalt decide which of the two gems is to be thine at the price. The choice is thine."

When the old man heard that saying of Jair's, his beard bristled and the sweat ran down his face. He got up from the place where he sat, and spat on the wall where Jair's shadow rested. "Why dost thou mock me, seeing that I am an old man? The sum that I offered was not for one of thy gems, but for them both." Then Jair looked at him very sorrowfully, as a strong man looks at one who is smitten with a sore sickness. "Thou art old, my father, too old for a life of

labour; thou hast travelled much in the sun, and the tempests have raged round thy head these many years. I am not angry with thee, for age and its infirmities are sacred. I, too, will be old, too old to reason aright, some day; may they with whom I deal then bear with my infirmities, as I bear with thine. Now, I pray thee, let me remove my shadow from thy presence, lest I anger thee again"; and he made as if to go upon his journey. But the trader caught him by his garment and would not let him depart. So once more they debated the matter, going over the same ground again and again, as oxen go over the same path day after day to water, until they arrived at a price which gave satisfaction to both; then they struck hands and were satisfied.

Outside the old man's house Jair met a woman who was selling doves which she had snared in the woods, and Jair spoke to her, for she was young and comely and pleasing to the eye, and he asked her concerning a place where he might lodge, for the shades of evening were beginning to fall upon the world; and the woman, whose face was only half hidden by her veil, spoke modestly with her lips, but her bold eyes

said many things to Jair as she looked at him from under half-closed lids. Neither was he idle, for the language of the eye is older than the oldest hills, and these two understood each other without words. When Jair asked her concerning a place where he might lodge, the woman told him that the city was full to overflowing with people who had flocked in from near and far to be present at the feast and the gathering of men who would compete for the King's prizes. Now Jair knew nothing concerning the gathering the woman spoke of, though he had learned that the King was giving a great feast, so he said, "Tell me, what are these sports which draw men from near and far?" And the woman ran her eyes heavily and slowly over him as he stood before her, stabbing him with her glances, so that when next their eyes met Jair's eyes were full of burning fire, but the woman's eyes were heavy and languorous like a honeycomb filled to overflowing. Then the woman said, "If thou art indeed a stranger in the city, there is much that I can tell thee. Come with me, for my good man has gone upon a long journey, and will not return until the summer is passed; the places where the travellers

stop are full of robbers and brawlers, but with me there is peace and safety; fresh milk warm from the udders of asses to be bought for a small price, a kid stuffed with olives is but a little matter; and fruit may be had for the plucking, and wild doves for the trouble of snaring; there are fish in the rivers which are free to all. Come then, and we will be merry together, for, like thee, I belong not to this city; my friends and my kindred dwell afar off, and there is none to chide me."

So Jair went with her to her home outside the walls of the city, for there was that in his nature which made him unstable as water in the hands of a woman. When the night had fallen, Jair sat with the "seller of doves" under a fig tree that cast its shade over her dwelling; and the woman sang songs to him whilst he watched the gleaming stars come out in the dark blue heavens; and to him the stars in their quivering beauty were as the spear-points of a host marching to battle; the moaning of the river mingled with the music of the woman's song, and the coy laughter of the wind amidst the leaves of the trees blended with the music that she made with her fingers on the rude instrument formed of a piece of dried goat's-

skin stretched upon a bent willow bough; across the goat's-skin ran a number of strings, drawn tight almost to breaking; these strings were the tendons of asses dried and split; and from these strings, with cunning fingers, the woman drew sweet sounds which harmonised with her voice and with the rhythmic sounds of nature.

When she grew tired of singing she threw herself upon the grass at the feet of Jair, and rested her head against his knee and talked; and it came about that, as she talked, she told him of her birthplace, which was the little Valley of Sorek. She spoke of Delilah the beautiful, and of the great man with the beard like a sheaf of golden grain and the hair like tangled gold who had come to Sorek and wooed the Philistine damsel. When she spoke of the man's strange beauty, of his unbounded strength, of his skill as a hunter, of his courage, then Jair knew that she was speaking of his countryman Samson, and he questioned her closely concerning all that the man had done in the valley. When the woman saw that the tale interested him, she was pleased, and went on to tell of Delilah, whom all women envied because of her beauty. "Fairest was she

amongst the daughters of men; when she danced, the young men had eyes for no other; when she sang, they were deaf to all other sounds: that was before the great man came to Sorek. But now"—the woman laughed as she spoke, a rich laugh, full from the folds of her throat—"now she stands alone, forsaken by the stranger who came to woo her, despised by all who once sought her; every morning she searches the land with her eyes for him, every evening she shades her eyes with her hand, looking between the sunlight and the shadow for the one that cometh not."

"Doth she then love him so much that she will not be comforted?" asked Jair. "Love him," crooned the woman, "love him? Dost thou think there is nothing in a woman but love and submission? It is not love that makes Delilah watch for the great stranger, it is hate—hate that knows no bridle. If he comes again to the Valley of Sorek an army will not save him, for there is nothing so tireless as a woman's hate born of slighted love." "Dost thou think he will come again?" "I know not. We in the Valley of Sorek know nothing, save that he came amongst us looking like a god, and that he left

us even as he came, suddenly and silently. We know nothing concerning either his country or his kindred where he came from; whither he went none can tell. The wise ones in Sorek say that he will be seen no more. Only the woman Delilah believes that he will some day return; and in such things the foolishness of women is more far-seeing than the wisdom of the wise."

Jair pondered deeply over the words of the "seller of doves," for his hate and fear of Samson never slumbered, and he said, "First I will make many friends here in high places, then I will make a journey to Sorek and see this woman Delilah, for, like her, I too think Samson will surely return. The face of the woman will entice him, and the danger of the visit to Philistia, where his enemies are, will add zest to his love-making. Ho! Samson, I will yet have thee in the toils."

CHAPTER VII

THE RACE OF SPEARS

THE city was alive with life and bustle; warriors in all the glory of their armour moved to and fro, brushing the common people from their path as though they had been flies. Red-headed, red-bearded men, with savage sullen faces, bearing great clubs wrought out of solid stone slung on their wrists by green hide-thongs, tramped where they listed, giving a buffet with their hands where others gave a snarling word, treading upon all who came in their way as though men were dirt. These were the dwellers in the hills, who lived on the flesh of beasts and touched not fruit or fish. Men from the desert were there — tall, lithe, and light — riding their barebacked steeds even in the press of the city without bridles, guiding their animals with a word or a pressure of the knee. Their weapons

consisted of a long light spear that quivered in their hands like a reed ; on the left fore-arm they bore a tiny shield made from the hide of the great water-beasts that swarmed in the rivers. So thick and tough was the hide that it would turn the edge of the heaviest sword or the point of the keenest lance. Others were there—grim, fierce, huge-framed men, black as winter's midnight, moving not as menials, but as warriors and the equals of the best they brushed against. And here and there a Hebrew, conspicuous even in that throng by the brilliant eye, the intellectual face, the curving nose.

At a corner where the press of people was not great, Jair stood and watched the throng ; by his side was the "seller of doves," she pointed out to him each chief who was known to her by sight—praising, reviling, laughing, as the humour seized her. But Jair did not follow her words too closely, he was watching with the eye of an eagle for one man. Whenever a shout went up from the mob he followed the sound with his eyes ; whenever he saw one of vast stature pushing through the crowd, he strained his eyes to catch sight of him, for it had grown upon him that his

enemy Samson would come to take part in the sports; but he looked in vain. Suddenly there was a great tumult; the guards in the street beat back the thronging mob, men were dashed aside, women and children were hurled back like offal until a lane was made. "What is it, why all this uproar?" asked Jair. And the "seller of doves" made answer, "It is the King's prize for the race of spears. This is the custom: the King sends his prize through the city the day before the trial of skill, that all the men in the city may see it." "What is this prize, woman?" "Who can tell," she answered; "every time it is different. Wait and we shall see."

So they waited, until down the lane of people came six snow-white bulls harnessed to a war-car made of wood and iron, decorated with ivory and silver. Under a canopy of crimson cloth, embellished with gay coloured feathers, two virgin slaves sat enthroned; one was white skinned, with reddish-brown hair; the other was as black as a raven's wing. Around the neck of each ran a collar of gold, to which was fastened a silver chain; on each side of the neck these chains fell over the virgins' shoulders, down their bare breasts, and

were fastened to a bracelet of plain gold which was riveted to each wrist. Around their waists ran a deep silver band; and upon their legs, just above the ankles, were bands of silver; from the right thigh to the left ankle ran a chain of fine gold, crossed by a similar chain, which ran from the left thigh to the right ankle. In their hands they carried fans made of brilliant feathers, whilst upon their uncombed heads rested wreaths of flowers. The whiteness of the white slave made the blackness of her companion the more apparent, as snow falling at midnight makes the darkness seem darker. Both were damsels of splendid figure, and the rude athletes who were to compete for this prize jostled one another in their eagerness to get as close as possible to the King's trophy. Shouts of applause rang from the lips of the common throng, to whom a spectacle was always pleasing. The two virgins looked carelessly at the seething mob. Someone, they neither knew nor cared whom, in that great crowd would own them before the world was many hours older; perhaps he would keep them, perhaps he would sell them for a price—what did it matter: they were captives, in any case, so they

sat aloft and enjoyed their brief triumph, poor puppets of an hour.

The following day the city was astir before the dawn had broken, and the populace in its tens of thousands flocked forth to the Valley of Gilgal, where the sports were to take place. The great ones rode upon horses, or on asses' colts, richly caparisoned, or upon camels decked out in all the bravery of dyed wool and shimmering silk. Others were carried by slaves, reclining at ease at full length on plaited thongs stretched upon two poles; four slaves bore these lounges, each man having an end of a pole upon his shoulder; female slaves walked by the side of the lounges carrying fans and wine in skins, or else their arms were laden with little baskets full of all the fruits and flowers of the season. The baser sort went on foot. Some carried clear spring water in long narrow skins, to sell to those who might feel athirst; others had honey in the comb, which they cried unceasingly, extolling its excellence. Others, again, carried upon their backs, in jars made of baked clay, a fermented liquor made from honey, with which the common people made merry, even to drunkenness; wine also they sold, made from the crushed fruit of the

pomegranate. Others, again, sold little jars full of curdled asses' and camels' milk. Nor were these vendors of food and drink alone in the struggle for trade on this day. Here an old woman moved along crooning the virtues of her wares; she was a seller of charms which would enable those who bought them to tell beforehand who would win in the various contests, and so increase their riches; and of these the foolish ones purchased many. Farther along, a man who looked like a Hebrew walked in the midst of three or four stout fellows, who shouted his name and his praises in the ears of all who passed near by. He was one who professed to know all about the various competitors, and was willing to part with his knowledge for a small reward to whomsoever might seek him. To him came a young man of great proportions, saying, "Art thou he that can tell who will win to-day?" And the fellow said, "I am that man. What is it thou wouldst know?" Then the young man said, "I am Helibron of El Rimmon, tell me, shall I win the race of spears this day?" To which the fellow, hoping for a reward, replied, "I read thy name in the stars last night, yet am I not certain; either first or

second thou shalt be in the race of spears before the sun sinks to rest this day." Then the young man dealt him a great buffet on the side of the head with his open hand, and did likewise to his servants, for he said, "The fellow lied like a dog's son, telling me I should win the race of spears, whereas I am not to be a competitor in that race but in the trial of strength at the casting of the stone. He said he saw my name in the stars, yet I warrant I have made him see more stars this day than he ever saw before after dawn." Whereat the guards of the public peace and the populace laughed lustily, and the man of vaunted wisdom crept away amidst the raillery of the rabble.

Arriving at the ground, the people scattered themselves on the hills allotted to them, whilst the more favoured ones took up their places on hills which had been kept apart for them. There was no building, no amphitheatre; the place of contest was a small plain, surrounded by low hills in a complete circle, around which a rugged wall had been raised. There had been two small hills in the middle of this plain, but they had been levelled to the ground by an army of slaves years

before, in the reign of the great King's father ; all the open space had been trodden hard and level by the soft feet of camels, driven forty abreast in an ever - narrowing circle until the centre had been reached, so that it lay like the palm of a man's hand, so clean and bare that no bird could rest there and not be observed. At the side farthest from the people were the cages where the beasts were kept. In one of these a fierce white bull, with red eyes, was lashing itself to madness ; its legs and nostrils had been smeared with honey, and the cage where it was confined was built over an ant hill. The heat of the day had drawn the ants forth, and the honey had drawn them to the bull ; their torments were fast driving the savage brute to madness. Vainly he tore the ground with horn and hoof, vainly he bellowed in his wrath, seeking for something to slay.

A hush fell upon the people. Two men advanced into the open plain walking jauntily, each carried two short spears pointed with jasper ; they walked to the centre of the plain together, then separated, one going to the east, the other to the west, until a distance of thirty paces divided them ; then they

turned towards the spot where the King of Assyria sat with his captains and the women of his household, and they bowed themselves to the earth thrice. The King made a sign; the men on the plain turned towards the cages where the animals were; the gates flew asunder; the frantic bull thundered out like an avalanche, striding over the open plain so quickly that the eye could scarce follow its course.

For a time, in its mad wrath, the beast saw nothing in front of it but space, and came on in a line that led between the pair, who stood like statues leaning upon their spears. At last the red eyes fell upon the men; without a moment's hesitation the bull lowered its head and swept down upon him who stood at the eastern end. The man drew himself up quickly, took one spear in his right hand and balanced the other deftly in his left hand; for a moment he poised himself gracefully, then cast the spear. A contemptuous laugh rang out from the man on the western end; the spear had ripped the white hide on the bull's quarter and had glanced off to skid along the ground. The thrower glanced quickly towards the other man; that glance told that his nerve had

failed him. He might have stepped aside as the bull came on and have driven the spear into the passing beast, but it was not lawful for him so to do; the penalty for that was death or slavery, according to the King's choice. He had to cast both spears as the bull came at him, then, if he failed, he might try what fleetness of foot could do for him. He raised his right arm to throw, paused irresolute, then cast the spear wildly. The next moment a shriek rang out upon the air; a horn had hit him just above the hips, and, tearing through the bowels, came out beside the spine; for half a second he was dashed along the dust; then, with one magnificent, triumphant toss of the shaggy head, the bull sent the twisting, twining body of the man high in air; and a great shout went up from the assembled multitude.

The bull heard that wild human roar, and stood rooted to the ground; slowly the great head swept round, until the flaming eyes fell upon the form of that other man who still stood leaning with graceful ease upon his spears. Without a sound the bull leapt into its stride—tail straight out behind it, horns levelled like lances stained with the blood of its victim, whilst down its snow-

white flanks the crimson trickled from the wound the spear had made. The man stood firmly on his feet ; one spear, point downwards, he drove into the ground ; the other he poised in his left hand, whilst with his right he shaded his eyes from the sun, for the bull had wheeled and was coming down upon him with the sun behind it. Silence fell on all men, silence so great that the winking of an eyelid would almost have broken the stillness. On rushed the brute ; the man lifted his head higher, dropped his right hand until his clenched fist rested near his hip ; his back bent like a bow, until his shoulders lay right back out of the perpendicular ; then, like a bow unbent, the back straightened, the shoulders came forward, the arm flew outward, and the spear hissed upon its mission ; the jasper point cut through the tangled mane, opened the hide upon the muscular neck, missed the spine by a hair's-breadth as it plunged into the solid flesh beyond the shoulders. The bull threw up his horned head, snapping the spear-shaft like a sun-dried bough ; the man snatched the other spear with a movement so quick that it told of matchless nerve ; down on one knee he dropped, gripping the shaft of his

spear in both hands, burying the butt in the soil in front of his knee. This was a man of better mould than the last one; if he died he would die struggling for victory. The great beast charged recklessly, the spear-point flicked along the white throat, ripped through hair and hide, and was buried by the impact of the charging body an arm's-length in the broad chest. So stern was the stroke, so unyielding the arm, that the bull swerved, and staggered as he swerved; like a streak of falling light the man hurled his body to one side, and the savage brute thundered past, leaving him unscathed.

Then men and women drew deep breaths, and shrieked forth words of wild applause; women waved flowers and feathers; men threw their bare arms towards heaven, and called upon the gods to guard the man who risked his life so disdainfully; warriors, whose hands had been reddened by a hundred battles, looked at him with flashing eyes and envied him his prowess. The white bull turned again, blood streamed in a rich current from shoulder and chest—the life-blood which nothing could stay, yet his foe lived. Instinct told the great brute that there was no

time to waste ; on he rushed. And now that the man was unarmed, his wit and his feet were all that remained to him. When he had avoided the bull's rush he had darted off towards the nearest wall, and Jair the fleet of foot knew that he was a great runner ; but no man born of a woman could out-pace that pursuing beast. As the bull gained on him, drawing nearer and nearer, the man ran with his chin on his shoulder. In a straight line he ran, until the hot breath from the expanded nostrils steamed on his very buttocks ; one stride more, one little fraction of time, the horns touch the human skin. The people scream vain warnings to the straining man ; women close their eyes ; men grip their lips with hard, set teeth until the blood flows ; the bull tosses his armed head high. But the man had wheeled as the swallow wheels when the sparrow-hawk swoops,—and the crimson line on the quivering thigh tells how near the doorway to death he had been. The bull plunges on, dyeing the ground with blood as he goes ; one fore-leg bends under him, and he goes down for a moment, his muzzle in the dust, but only for a moment. The man is running again ; the brute charges once more ; again the awful strain takes place ; the man

swerves once more and saves himself. But, as he wheels, he stumbles and almost falls. His chest is rising, falling, bursting; and the barrier is almost within his reach. One short rapid dash, one bold spring, and he will be in the arms of the multitude! The people cheer him madly, the barrier seems so close in their eyes; to him it is leagues away. He has no time to think—the bull is almost on top of him again; his throat is full of something that chokes him; yet he runs on, twisting and turning like a hare; and the bull, grown warier now, twists and turns with him, coursing him as wolves course a stag. He runs blindly, hands stretched out in front of him. He feels as if the gods had chained the hills to his feet. His hands crash into the palisade—one spring, one effort, and he will be safe. The people are crowding on top of one another now, men strike at each other fiercely for the right to see, women raise their shrill voices clamorously to the gods; the man drags himself up inch by inch painfully. The bull, swaying to right and left, drags itself foot by foot nearer the fugitive; each breath it draws pumps the remnant of its life-blood up and out; all its strength has gone, only the red eyes in the white circlets of

hair blaze with vindictive hate. On, on, on, until, with a sob that is a defiance, it sinks dead under the man who has almost topped the palisades. He hears the people shout once more ; he casts his eyes behind, below him ; his last remnant of strength vanishes, and he falls backwards on to the spear-pointed horns of his foe ; and together they are dragged from the plain to make food for the vultures.

Other sports follow : Wrestling between black men and white ; the casting of the rock, which was a simple trial of thews and sinews. A place was marked off in front of the royal seat. A great black man with a snow-white sheepskin around the upper part of his body stepped on to the plain, carrying a huge jagged piece of rock upon his shoulder ; he walked as lightly and as easily under his load as a maid with a honeycomb. He was the champion of the previous year, and defender of the rock ; he laid the boulder down by the mark and bowed to the King. Then out into the arena came a troop of men of all colours, all climes ; and each cast the rock as far as his strength would allow him. But none reached the limit of the black champion's cast, until the Mon-

golian giant, the champion of all the yellow races, who had stood back until the last, made his effort. When he threw, a cry of wonder rose on all sides, for the sharp edges of the rock were buried in the ground a full stride beyond the mark of the black.

Later, there was a contest between men riding upon horses, asses, colts, and strange animals that were neither horse nor ass. These animals had tails and ears like the asses; their bodies and heads were shaped like horses; they had no manes; the ground-colour of their bodies was similar to that of the ass, but yellow and black bands alternately circled body and limbs. The men who rode these creatures were little fierce fellows from the plains, dark brown in colour, who marked their bodies with pigments made from clay found at the roots of certain bushes known only to themselves. When their steeds were in motion they threw themselves almost at full length on the animals' backs, resting their heads alongside the creatures' necks, so that at a very small distance they were nearly invisible; only the keenest eyes were able to discern which was the man and which the beast; yet such mastery had they over their steeds that at a word they would leap forward in full gallop,

or stop in mid-flight, or wheel to right or left. These men would cast a javelin with all their force, then dart off in pursuit, picking it from the ground as they passed without losing their seats or checking their speed. Others would rush onward as if pursued by an enemy ; then they would drop to the earth and lie prone, whilst their animals continued onwards ; then they would rise suddenly and cast their javelins at an imaginary enemy ; then running forward they would utter a peculiar cry, and their animals would instantly stop in their flight, and gallop back to their masters, who would vault on to their backs and rush off, filling the air with strange triumphant noises. None of the riders, whether mounted upon asses, horses, or striped beasts, had any kind of trappings upon their chargers, but guided them by pressing their knees, or by word of mouth ; and in the contests the striped animals won, for they were the fleetest.

When the racing had ended, the slingers came forth to show their skill, and amongst them was Jair the Hebrew. At a sign appointed one of the King's guards stood forth, and, drawing his naked sword from a ring of iron which was fastened by a band of leather to his thigh, he held

the blade aloft with his two hands above his head, the flat of his blade facing the slingers. If any man missed the blade, then he had to pay a fine for having entered the contest; if he missed the blade, and hit the holder thereof, then he was that soldier's slave for life, unless he could ransom himself. A great number missed both man and sword, and retired amidst the jeers of the multitude, who exhorted them to forsake weapons of war and sport, and hire themselves out as hewers of wood and drawers of water, the small boys in the throng insulting them with many bitter words. Of all the slingers, four only had struck the sword when it came to Jair's turn to try his skill, and there were many to follow him. The children in the assembly mocked him as he carefully selected a pebble from his scrip and fitted it into his sling, balancing it deftly in his hands, rejecting pebble after pebble. "Be careful, crooked beak," cried one urchin, whose shrill voice rang like a reed-pipe over the gruffer voices of the men; "be careful, crooked beak, for if thou hittest the soldier thou wilt be his slave." But Jair heeded not the laughter that followed the boy's voice. Walking steadily to the mark from whence the

slingers had to run before throwing, he called to the soldier to turn the edge of the sword towards him; and the soldier obeyed, marvelling within himself what manner of man this might be who disdained to throw at the flat of a sword, but must needs risk defeat by casting at the sword's edge. When the soldier was ready, Jair ran the ten paces allotted him, and then whirling the sling around his head, after the manner of the Hebrews when hunting or in battle, he cast his stone, and fire flashed from the blade where the flint and the steel met. When those that had yet to show their skill saw what Jair had done they drew off from the sport, and would have none of it, for Jair's prowess amazed them; but he, spreading his palms downwards, made answer that it was but a little matter, a thing for boys to do amongst his people.

Then one standing by asked him, "Where are thy people? tell me, that I may never fight against them." But Jair could not, for he knew that if he did his people would disown him, because he had disowned the true God and had worshipped Dagon. So he said bitterly, "Where the eagles build their nests, there are my people;

if you would find them, go follow the flight of the eagles." And this saying was told unto the great King, who said, "When the day's sports are at an end bring that man before me that I may question him," and he gave orders for the sports to proceed.

A she-bear with two cubs was turned loose in the arena, and a red-bearded man, with a stone club fastened to his wrist, went forth to do battle with her; and it was the King's command that the man should slay the cubs before the bear should be harmed, unless indeed the bear should come upon him quickly to slay him. The man was a short, thick-set fellow, with bowed legs—a brutal-faced meat-eater who feared neither man nor beast. When he approached the bear she sat up, and, lifting her fore-paws, awaited him, with a cub on either side of her. As she sat thus upon her haunches, she was taller than the man by the breadth of a hand. The man walked slowly towards the bear until he got within springing distance, then, with a sudden bound, he leapt in and dashed his club on the head of the cub nearest to him and sprang away again. For a moment the bear stood dumbly, looking first at the dead cub then at the man; then she

dropped down upon all fours and rushed at him, growling dreadfully as she came. The hunter ran to meet her with swift, short strides; the bear rose up upon her haunches ready for battle: but the man dodged past her and made a back-handed stroke at the other cub as he passed. The stone club roughed the cub's fur near the neck, but did not hurt it. Again the bear pursued, and once again the hunter ran to meet her; again he dodged to one side as the bear rose up on its haunches; but this time the bear, instead of striking a downward blow with her fore-paws, as she had done the first time, struck a sweeping blow, which fell across the belly of the man so that his bowels fell out. He half turned, and smote at the bear with his full force, for he no longer respected the law of the King—he knew that he was a dead man; but the bear was too close when the stroke fell for the club to do the animal mortal hurt; then the bear struck and the man was still.

Another man came out with a club, and the bear shuffled off, driving her cub in front of her; but there was no avenue of escape for her. The man approached warily, and drawing the skin

from his loins cast it towards the bear on the side farthest from the cub. With a snarl of rage the bear dashed forward to rend the skin with her teeth; then the hunter, darting in, killed the cub with one stroke of his club and fled hot-foot without turning his head. The bear stopped and licked the crushed head of her young, and the hunter stopped and advanced again to the fight. The she-bear would not be tempted to do battle, but stood all the time on guard over her young; so the man, becoming over-confident, stepped inward to slay her; then she launched herself upon him, clasping him in her arms, and they—even they on the outer edges of the crowd—heard his bones break in that awful grasp. After that the bear went from her young to the men, each in turn, moaning like a woman who has lost her children and will not be comforted. Her offspring she licked with her tongue, but the men she turned over with her great paws.

Outside, amongst the club-men, there was much strife as to who should be next to attack the bear, each man urging his own claims to be the next, until they were like to have fallen upon one another, for they were a fierce and turbulent

people. So the King's man touched one with his sword, saying, "This man shall be the next," and he went. As soon as the she-bear saw him, she left her dead and went at great speed to meet him, for now she had nothing to guard she was full of ferocity. The man waited for her, and when she upreared herself he smote a swinging stroke with all his might; but the bear dropped upon all fours, so that the club passed harmlessly over her head; then she seized the man before he could recover his balance; and when the people looked again there was no man there, only the shreds and tatters of what had been a man; and all the club-men gave a great shout, for this was a battle after their own hearts.

And when they would have opened the gate to allow another to enter, the she-bear rushed to the entrance and would have given them all battle, for she was a mother robbed of her young. At this one of the club-men said to a soldier, "Lend me thy back for a moment," and the soldier bowed his back, so that the club-man vaulted on to his shoulders, and from his shoulders he sprang to the top of the palisade and thence into the arena. The bear saw him land, and

ran towards him; and he, running with his chin on his shoulders, saw that she gained upon him; and when she rose up to strike him, he whirled his club round with a back-handed stroke which fell on the side of the bear's head, and the bones of the head were smashed like the shell of an egg.

When the carcasses of the men and bears had been removed, there entered the plain a number of men mounted upon swift camels who engaged in races. Their camels were adorned with rows of bells, and little balls of wool, dyed all colours of the rainbow, were strung in circles about their necks; they wore hoods between their ears covered with little bells of silver, which emitted sweet sounds as they moved; around their fore-legs were circlets of many-coloured wool, with bells attached. The riders of the camels were also quaintly attired. Some wore nothing but a long seamless gown of white linen, bound around the waist with a girdle of bright silk; others wore a similar garment of many colours, with a white upper garment which was sleeveless; over this they wore a coat of richest silk. Some were bare-headed, except for a couple of eagle's feathers

wreathed in their hair; others wore a great pile of silk and linen mixed, wound round their heads, towering up half an arm's-length over their heads. Others, again, wore the head and mask of a lion, a fox, a bear, or a leopard, with all the teeth grinning from the extended jaws. Some had birds for head covering, such as the eagle, the bustard, the raven, or the crane. They drove the camels by means of long cords of twisted silk, which passed through a hole bored through the nostrils; a little ball made of the gum of a desert shrub was fastened to the silk, each side of the nostril, so that when the silk was jerked either to the right hand or the left the camels felt the pressure, and went where their masters wanted them.

When the signal for the start was given the camels were all kneeling in a line, the riders standing beside them. At the signal, each man shouted to his camel by name to rise, and as they rose the men bounded nimbly on to their backs and urged the ungainly creatures round the arena at their best pace. Now, it was known to the small boys who were amongst the multitude that at a strange hissing cry of "Oosta!" a camel

would, if he were trained, stop in mid-flight and drop to its knees to allow its master to alight. The camels had to circle the plain three times, and when they who were foremost came past the spot where the youths were standing, the young ones called with one voice "Oosta!" and the foremost camels immediately fell to their knees, as if smitten to the heart with javelins, casting some of those who were riding them over their heads on to the ground, for in the excitement of the race many of the riders had leant far out on their camel's necks to urge them to greater speed by shouting commands in their ears. When those riders who were cast off rose out of the dust and brushed the dirt from their beards, they spat towards the youths, and cursed them, calling them dogs and sons of dogs, and the people laughed until they cried.

The race of spears was next to claim the attention of the people, that being the last of the day's festivities. A cord of white and crimson silk was stretched for a distance of fifty paces, each end being held by two of the royal guard; then a spearman of the King's soldiers cast his spear with all his might from behind the silken

cord straight down the plain, and another cord was drawn across the plain for fifty paces in a line with the spot where the soldier's spear still quivered in the ground. When this was done, another soldier advanced, and he also cast his spear to the full limit of his powers, and again a silken cord was drawn and held in place; then a third soldier hurled his spear, and another cord was drawn where his spear fell. Each cord was held as high as a tall man's shoulder, the fourth cord being distant from the first three full spear-casts.

The King's command was, that, at a signal, all the competitors, who stood twelve paces beyond the first cord, might advance and throw each one his spear, which had to fall beyond the cord at each cast. When he had cast his spear, the competitor had to leap the cord and make his way at all speed to the second cord, which he had to leap; then he had to cast his spear over the next cord; and so on, until all were passed. The man who was the first to leap the last cord was to possess the King's prize. If any failed to cast his spear over the dividing cord, or if he failed in his leap, he was to become the slave of

the men who held the cords, unless he could ransom himself. This race of spears demanded great fleetness of foot, also great endurance, strength, and skill. The fleet runners often lacked the strength to hurl the spear over the lines; whilst they who possessed the bodily strength to perform this feat easily were too heavy-footed to hope to win. Others, who were both strong and fleet when on level ground, found themselves unable to leap the lines. Few indeed in all the land were fashioned strong of arm, fleet of foot, supple, and full of spring, and capable of running untiringly to the end. It was not only those qualities that were required, but judgment and discretion.

Only ten men faced the captain of the King's guard when the time came, and amongst the ten stood Jair the Hebrew. The captain of the guard gave each man his station, and as he did so he called aloud the name and country of the champion. When he came to Jair, who was the last on the outside of the line, he said, "What is thy name? and thy country, where is it?" Then Jair said, "I am called 'The Slinger,' my country is where the eagles are." The captain replied, "That is no country, for the eagles are every-

where when there is spoil to be gathered." Whereat Jair laughed, saying, "So also am I." Then ten spears, each of a different colour, were distributed amongst them. When the men were all ready in their places, the King's captain dropped the point of his sword to the ground, and the men all sprang forward, but Jair was the first to move. He ran lightly half-way to the cord and hurled his spear, then stepping easily and without great hurry he sprang over the cord, and ran with ease to the next leap; but the rest, after casting their spears, ran with all their might, and Jair was last over the second line. And the King's captain said to one of his fellows, "That fellow with the crooked beak claimed the eagles as his kinsfolk, yet he runneth like a cow—he is already out of the race." But his fellow, who was a man of discernment, said, "Judge not until it is time to judge; the prize is not at this end." By the time Jair reached his spear every man had thrown for the second time, but some had fallen short in their haste; others had cast their spears so wildly that they had to run out of the straight line to get them; but Jair, gathering himself together, cast his spear straight

in front of him, and it stood in the earth quivering, ready for him when he should come for it. Again Jair ran easily, and it looked to the beholders as if he had no great interest in the race. All the others were racing at headlong speed towards the third leap, but two of them found sorrow awaiting them; one leaping from too great a distance, fell bodily upon the cord; and the other, misjudging his ground, ran too close in and could not rise to the leap. These two who failed, with two whose spears had fallen short, fell out of the race, and were claimed by the guards. When Jair came to the cord he took the leap in his stride like a buck, then coolly running to his spear he cast it gracefully over the last barrier. The other five men were a great way in front of him, but they were now running wide like working bullocks full of water, and when Jair's eyes fell upon them he smiled; then, running easily as a wolf runs, he measured the distance between himself and the last leap with his eyes; then, throwing his head back, clenching his hands hard up against his chest, he laid the ground behind him like a hare. So fast did he run that the men who were panting along in front

of him seemed to be standing still. When he caught the hindermost man, that man thought that the shadow of a cloud driven by the wind had swept by him, and, dropping his chin upon his chest, he still struggled forward hoping for victory. There were but five strides between the foremost man and the last cord when Jair came abreast of him, but there was blood and foam on the fellow's lips, and he ran as one whose eyes had been plucked out by the carrion birds. At the right moment, Jair rose from the ground like a young eagle, and there was twice the breadth of a man's hand between his feet and the cord when he bounded over it. Jair ran on, picked up his spear and then knelt down, drew his breath deeply and slowly like one whose work was done and well done. The second man ran blindly into the rope and fell under it, and lay there. The third, leaping feebly, fell on the cord and hung there, his forepart on one side his hinderpart on the other. The fourth man, reeling out of his course, ran into the soldiers who held the cord at one side. Only the fifth man, he who had counted Jair as a shadow, seeing nothing in front of him but beaten men, looking behind and

seeing none to follow him, rested a while on his hands and knees, then rose, and with a final effort scrambled over the cord and picked up his spear. Then it was that he saw Jair, and the cup of his triumph was dashed from his lips; so bitter was his heart in that moment that he took his spear and fell upon it, and they threw his body to the vultures.

But Jair was taken before the great King Shalmaneser, who was the ruler over all the Assyrians; and Jair found favour in his eyes because he answered all the King's questions with shrewdness, and the King gave Jair permission to dwell in the land. So Jair bought a field and caused the artificers to build him a house, where he dwelt with the two virgins who had come to him as a prize for the race of spears; yet was he not content, for his soul was greedy for much riches. All the precious stones which he had stolen from his wife, when he fled from the City of Sanctuary, he converted into ready money, which he loaned to the officers of the great King's guard; for these were mostly young men who made wagers one with the other, and when they had not the wherewithal to pay that which they owed, they borrowed from Jair; and he, as of old

time, sowed with one hand and reaped with two, scattering silver and gathering gold. Nor was he content with the riches he gained from the soldiers, but casting his eyes upon the husbandmen he saw that they were often needy, and to them he lent also, taking surety from them on their growing crops, until it came about that though he sowed no grain his barns were always full to overflowing, and the best fruits of the land were his. He did not sell his grain, as other men sold theirs, to the first comer, but inquired diligently of all travellers concerning the countries round about; and, when he heard that there was a famine in a country, he loaded up his camels and sent grain to the rulers of that country, always demanding fourfold the value of his grain. And as hunger and famine knew no law beyond the necessities of the moment, he always obtained that which he asked, and he waxed rich on the necessities of his neighbours.

Yet, in spite of all these things, he was not happy, for his soul yearned for vengeance upon his enemy Samson. At last one came to him who told him of famine in the land of the Philistines, so he loaded his camels with wheat,

oil, dried figs, and wine, and said to his merchant, "Seek no profit from the Philistines, take what I give thee as a gift to them; but, above all things, see that thou singest my praises in their ears; and see that thou takest good care of the woman whom I shall send with thee, take her to that country and bring her back safely." This he said concerning the "seller of doves," whom he had spoken to privily, telling her that she should travel with his merchant-men to her own country. When she arrived there she was to go to the Valley of Sorek, and learn all that was to be learned concerning Samson. "Seek the woman Delilah, and when thou hast found her, give her this gift, saying, 'It cometh from the hand of one who hateth him whom thou hatest.'" The "seller of doves" said, "Where is thy gift?" Then Jair commanded his servants to bring to him a great camel laden with all good things, which Jair had packed with his own hands. So the merchant bade his slaves drive the fifty camels one behind the other towards the land of Philistia; but he and the "seller of doves" rode side by side, and, nodding their heads one at the other, said, "There is a woman in it."

CHAPTER VIII

DELILAH'S WAITING

THE passing time had left no impress on the Valley of Sorek; the river still sang merrily between its grassy banks; cattle and sheep and the big-horned goats still browsed in the meadows; the hills that girdled the valley were as beautiful as of old, only the men and women looked quieter, sadder, more oppressed than on that summer's evening when Samson wooed Delilah amongst the corn.

No growing grain burnished the fields with a golden sheen, for a strange plague had killed the growing crops. All had been well at springtime; the young wheat had pushed the earth aside and raised its green banner proudly over all the valley, and the husbandmen had said each to his fellow, "This will be a richer harvest than the last; what shall we do with our grain, surely the

granaries will not hold it all?" Summer had come with poppy flowers amidst the corn, with soft warm breath to fan the fruits of the fields and the trees to rich perfection. Then dawned a day when out of the west came a wind that blew without ceasing for seven days and seven nights—a wind so fierce that the grass curled up and lay dead on the baking ground; the corn died where it stood, and the west wind broke it off close to the ground and swept it whithersoever it listed; the half-ripe figs shrivelled on the drooping trees, and at evening when the sun was down they fell from the boughs; the grapes which were filling with green juice ready for ripening dried on the stems, and hung between the leaves dry and sapless; the pomegranate, while yet half ripe, burst open, showing the yellow seeds in the white moulds instead of the rich crimson seeds in the yellow moulds—even the birds could not eat them, so harsh and bitter were they to the taste; the cattle and sheep on the hillsides had sickened before the breath of the west wind, and many had perished, only the goats lived through it all and cared not. Neither had the olive trees escaped from the scourging

wind; the olives had struggled against the curse when the vine and the fig and the corn had failed; but in the end the olive trees had bowed their branches richly laden, and rained down in the dust the harvest that had been the hope of the husbandmen, so that there was neither corn nor oil nor wine to be found in Sorek.

Strong men had felt their sinews slacken whilst that heat wave passed over the land; little lakes, that no man had ever seen dry before, were licked up by the lips of the wind and became dry land; small rivulets that had their home in the hills ceased to run, the land was dry-eyed and tearless in its sorrow. Women who were suckling babes became lean breasted and barren of milk; little children drooped and died; vainly the mothers rocked them in their arms in the shade of the houses during the day; vainly they walked with them by the river's side through the long hours of the stifling night. The soft dimpled flesh on the baby limbs melted away until the parched skin hung from the brittle bones like the wrinkled skin of age; the lovely rounded features passed like a vision, leaving nothing but the bones beneath the skin; eyes that a few hours before

had sparkled with health and joy, lay far back beneath overhanging brows of bone—dull eyes with the shadow of death in their innermost depths.

Vainly the frantic mothers, suffering every pang that racked their little ones, hurried with trembling feet to the priests of Dagon; vain their petitions; vain the bleeding sacrifices of goats, of bullocks, of turtle-doves; vain their tears, their entreaties, their frenzied cries: the little ones, like the half-ripened fruit on the olive trees, withered and died.

The priests, the arch-impostors of the ages, took off the golden circlets from their brows, took the sacred berries from their hair and heaped ashes and dust upon their heads; they rent their vestments asunder and abased themselves in the sacred groves: yet Dagon heard not, or if he heard he did not heed. They poured the sacred oil at the feet of their idols, and the greedy earth drank it; they burned corn of the last year's gathering; they washed the earth with wine where the shadows of the idols fell at morning, noon, and eventide: yet from the shadows none answered, save only Death the Destroyer.

The priests brought forth their knives and turned the sweet groves into a shambles, but the gods were dumb; only the voices of the mothers rose in a wailing cry asking help from the helpless. The stricken cattle in the parched fields raised their red eyes skyward and bellowed their petition; but the skies were pitiless. No god answered either sinless beast or sinful humanity—only Death the Destroyer, and his answer was final.

The priests drove the goats and the kine from the groves, and called aloud for human blood; and when they had offered up in vain the lives of bond-children, both male and female, then they cried, "Dagon is not satisfied! he must have the best in the valley; give us of the free children who are left, that Dagon's wrath be appeased." And the high priest brought forth the great knife with the curved blade and ivory handle, which was only used at the last rites. And the men of Sorek bowed to the will of the priests, and would have yielded up their offspring which were left, but the women rebelled, crying, "Shall the sinless lips that have clung to our breasts cry in vain to us for help? If Dagon will

not help us, we will help our children, or we will all utterly perish together." Then one who was a mother for the first time shouted, "If Dagon needs more blood, why should it not be the blood of a priest? If they are sinless, they are fit to die; if they are not sinless, are they fit to live, seeing that they are the sworn servants of a god? Come, let us give unto Dagon that which is Dagon's." And the women all rose up, and took knives from the tables, pruning-hooks from the barns, and stones from the walls—anything that was ready to their hands they took; and they made a circle round the priests, chanting wild sounds without words: and they were more terrible than an army that is set for the battle.

Then a vision came to the high priest, and he made a sign to the women to draw near to him, and when they came he said, "Dagon hath spoken—he is weary of blood; but one thing must thou do." When the women asked him, "What is the thing?" he cried, "Go to your homes now and purify yourselves with water, and come again an hour after the dawn has broken and I will tell you Dagon's message."

The woman who had shouted first against the priesthood laughed mockingly, and called, "O wise priest, that seest visions when the knife is at thine own throat, tarry a while and thou shalt hear more concerning this matter."

When all the women had gone to their homes, the priests drew round the high priest in the gathering darkness, and said unto him, "What thing will ye tell them at the dawning? what message hast thou from Dagon?" And the high priest said to his priesthood, "Dagon must deliver his own message in the morning; as for me, I have business that will not tarry, in a far country." And the priests when they heard that saying tarried not, but tucked their robes up about their loins and fled. And the high priest was not the slowest upon his feet, albeit he was a big man and a gross.

When the women came in the morning, lo, there was not a priest in Sorek! And even as they stood marvelling a cool wind sprang up, and came murmuring down the valley; the heavens opened and the windows thereof poured forth rain; the little children stretched their feeble arms to their mothers and smiled; the

cattle in the fields lifted up their voices and gave praise; the birds burst into song; the whole earth rejoiced. Only the men of Sorek hung their heads and were filled with shame; they could not look upon their young boys without blushing, so they filled in their idle hours cursing the false priests who had brought the thing upon them, and for that generation the Valley of Sorek was a place for a priest to avoid. From that day the grass grew in the fields and on the hillsides, but there was great dearth in the land because of the destruction of all the fruits of the earth.

When they sent trusty messengers forth to purchase for them, they returned to tell the valley that the same curse had swept over all the country of Philistia, and it was at this season that Jair's merchant-men arrived with the gift of corn, oil, wine, and dried figs and raisins. The elders of the people gathered round wondering at the sight, for they were full of amazement. Then it was that the chief merchant remembered Jair's command, and he began to sing the praises of his master in the ears of the people of Sorek. The stores of food and wine he distributed freely, and when they asked him, "How much do we

owe thee ? ” the merchant said, “Ye owe me nothing ; it is a gift from my lord who has heard of your sufferings, and pitied them. Some day he will come to your valley ; then, if your hearts are inclined towards him, ye may thank him ; if not, there is no harm done, it is but a little matter.” So the people flocked around to hear of this wonderful man who opened his storehouses as the gods opened the windows of heaven, opening their ears to receive the story of his goodness and their hands to receive the fruits of his bounty. Only Delilah stood afar off, for the other women would not let her draw near to the merchant and his train.

Very fair to see was this lovely woman—tall and straight, with the perfect fulness of the woman who has outgrown the girl. She stood under a lonely fig-tree on the crown of a hill, her hair was neatly braided back from her temples, a white gown which was seamless was her only covering, her neck and breast and arms were bare ; around her waist she wore a purple scarf which Samson had given her, upon her feet were sandals ; at her side, clinging to her gown, was a little child, a boy, fair and ruddy. The child was

not like his mother in form or feature, neither was he fashioned like the other children who were born in Sorek; he was of a greater build, and his nose curved downwards like an eagle's beak, whereas all the other children had straight noses. The women called him the little stray hawk, and their children pelted him away when he came amongst them eager for friendship.

The "seller of doves," who had accompanied the merchant, looked upon Delilah and the child, and knew them; so, taking the black camel which Jair had loaded with his own hands, she went to the lonely woman to do the bidding of Jair, her master. Then there ran out from the midst of the women of Sorek several women who claimed to be holy and clean above the lot of most women, whether matrons or virgins, and they plucked the "seller of doves" by the garment, crying, "Give nought unto the child for he is fatherless, and to the woman his mother give thou nothing for she has sinned." Then the "seller of doves" turned upon them fiercely, for she who had slipped herself from the highway knew how easy it was to stumble. "I am but the handmaiden of another," she said, "and do the will of the one

who sent me. The woman has sinned, ye say; have ye never sinned in secret? If I could look into your hearts as into a mirror should I not see something written there which is hidden from all but the gods? Get ye back to your husbands, women, and chide me not, for I too am a woman, and know that a vessel may be clean to the eye and yet be put to base uses. If ye were as stainless as this child, there would be more charity in your minds." Then those good women were filled with wrath, and said one to another, "No one ever spoke to us as this woman spake, she must be afflicted." Yet they ate of the good things brought by the merchant and missed no share in anything.

When the "seller of doves" was alone with Delilah, she said to her, "My master commanded me to give thee this gift, because he hates as thou hatest, waiting as thou waitest, hoping as thou hopest for a day of reckoning. Take the gift, the camel and all that is on its back, for it is thine." Then the two women and the child walked away to Delilah's home, leading the camel, and they talked of many things, for Delilah recognised in the "seller of doves" one

who had lived most of her life in Sorek, but most of all they talked of Samson. The "seller of doves" told Delilah the name of the man who had wooed her in the cornfields, and made love to her in the starlight and in the shadows of the olive groves. She told her his country, and the name of the place where his people dwelt, for so had Jair commanded her. After Delilah had heard these things she asked the "seller of doves," "Is this, then, that same Samson whose name is hated by all the Philistines because of the evil he has wrought amongst them?" The "seller of doves" told her all that was in her heart. "He is that Samson whose hands are red with the blood of our people, he hath burned the standing grain, and the loaded granaries hath he not spared; our people have felt the edge of his sword in times past, and who shall say we shall not feel his wrath again."

The child, who had grown weary of play, came to climb upon its mother's lap, but Delilah pushed the babe away, saying, "Get far from me, little hawk, for thou art thrice accursed." But the "seller of doves" took the curly head upon her lap, and smoothed the trouble from the baby

brow. Delilah, watching her, opened her heart to her sister woman. All her troubles she told, as they sat knee to knee with the little one between them. "Thou knowest how the young men sought me to make love to me openly before their fathers, before this man Samson came and bewitched me; now no youth passes me by without a saucy glance; no young man seeks me to win a favour from me, except he creeps up here like a fox slinking out of the sight of his fellows; no man who hath a wife in the valley stoppeth to speak with me, or inviteth me to cross the door of his house: but I could, if I would, tell some of the good wives of Sorek of husbands who are not ashamed to come near me by stealth, bringing a gift in their hands. If the wives are not more faithful than the husbands, then there are many in this Valley of Sorek whose sins are deeper scarlet than mine own. I am as an eagle that hath lost its mate, I am utterly wretched; yet if I had not met this man Samson I should still have been queen of the valley." Then said the "seller of doves," "O weak woman, if this man Samson stood again before thee in all his pride and beauty

thy heart would open to him as a flower opens to the sun." But Delilah laughed, and the sound of her laughter was more sorrowful than the moaning of another.

The next day the merchant called at the house of Delilah and had speech with her, doing Jair's business, for he was a sober man of good discretion. Besides, he and the "seller of doves" had smitten hands, and made a compact during the journey. But the little band of very good women in Sorek, when they saw whither he went and how long he tarried, put their tongues in their cheek, and spake to one another with their eyes, lifting and dropping the lids slowly; and they wore a very sad countenance, shaking their heads dismally, as though afflicted beyond bearing. When they spoke to the "seller of doves" concerning the matter, she laughed them to scorn, saying, "The deed is not with the man, but in your own hearts, women. How is it that ye who are so good are so eager to think evil concerning thy neighbours? Verily, I pray thee, drop thine eyes when thou meetest a man who is comely, lest a worse thing befall thee. A city that is troubled within its gates will not stand

long the assaults of an invader, rather will it open its gates and surrender at the first challenge." So those women went about their business, and when they met the merchant they spoke him fairly ; but Delilah they flouted, so that her heart was very bitter. When next she met the "seller of doves," "Tell me," she cried, "for I can see that he who sent thee here hath a plan ; tell me how I may be avenged on Samson, the destroyer of my happiness, who hath left me to bear my burden alone ?"

The "seller of doves" walked with Delilah by the riverside, laying out a plan whereby the great Hebrew might be undone ; and this was the web she wove. "When the merchants and I have gone upon our journey, thou, Delilah, shalt send one whom I shall leave with thee on a camel to the place where Samson dwells with his people ; and the man shall say to Samson, 'Delilah, the beautiful, hath sent me to thee to say her eyes are growing blind with tears because of thee ; the bloom of the pomegranate flower was on her cheek when first she saw thee, now the lily bloometh there because of the persecution of the people. Yet would she not have sent to thee,

Samson, had it not been for the young child that has come to her, who beareth thy image. For him she feareth, because the people say he must die the death; they have sworn to take the young child outside the valley and stone it until it dies. If thou art a man, Samson, come and advise me in this matter; bring a gift in thy hand for the people, and all will be well. But if thou art indeed a coward, who fears for his own life, tarry away and let a woman and a child suffer for thy folly.’” “Thinkest thou that he will come for my call?” asked Delilah. “Like a stag over the hills he will come, bringing with him a spear in one hand and a gift in the other. Fear not, Delilah, he will come. My lord, who sent me, hath known him from his youth up. In his pouch he will bring a treasure, on his hip a sword; he will buy peace, if peace is to be bought; if not he will rage through this Valley of Sorek like a lion.”

“It shall be done even as thou hast commanded, O ‘seller of doves.’ But when he cometh, how then shall he be humbled? The people in the valley talk boldly concerning him now that he is afar off, but as hares crouch in

the grass when a wolf passeth, so will they abase themselves when he is nigh, for they fear him in their hearts, saying his strength cometh from the gods." "Canst thou not laugh away their fears, little fool? Point to thy child and ask if he too came from the gods, use the child as a sharp weapon to undo the false father." Later on the "seller of doves" gave one of her servants a bag of money, telling him that in all things he was to obey the commands of Delilah; and the man went and acted faithfully.

After a little while the merchant and his caravan made ready to depart. The people of Sorek plucked flowers and strewed them in the path of the travellers, for their hearts were touched by the goodness of those who had befriended them. That same evening Delilah sent the servant who had been left with her in search of Samson, and the good women of the valley, calling one to the other like cats under a garden hedge, cried, "What new thing is the wanton planning now?" for whatsoever she did was evil in their eyes.

The merchant with his caravan and the "seller of doves" duly arrived again at the City

of Tibhath, where Jair awaited them, he being eager to hear and they to tell. Their story was soon told. When Jair had heard all things he was full of joy, for he knew the joints in Samson's armour. "Didst thou sing my praises in the ears of those fools in Sorek?" he asked his merchant. And the merchant answered him truly, saying, "So loud and long did I sing thy praises, that thy fame will never be forgotten while those men live."

So Jair sent him away with a gift in his hand. Neither was the "seller of doves" forgotten by Jair, for she was very useful to him. That other traveller, the one whom Delilah had sent forth, rode onward right into the eye of the setting sun. When he came to a town the people sought to know who he was and what was his mission? He asked first concerning their physicians who were reputed wise in healing, and when he found the name of the men who stood highest in their thoughts, he inquired for their dwellings, and when he had found a physician he would tell him that he had travelled almost from the birthplace of the sun to see him concerning a complaint from which his favourite wife suffered.

When the physician would inquire of him, "How didst thou hear of me?" the Assyrian would answer: "How did I hear of thee? Do not the birds carry thy fame to the four corners of the earth? As the stars in the heavens bear witness to the greatness of Him who made them, so do thy good works bear witness for thee." Then that man of healing would be flattered, and would command the Assyrian to sit down and talk with him concerning the complaint of his favourite wife; when he had heard all that afflicted the woman he would mix an ointment to rub into the woman's bones, or he would give a draught of bitter herbs or of sweet herbs. One would say, "Bid thy wife wash daily in the waters of a spring, bathing all her body, then let her anoint herself with my ointment—all will be well." Another, having heard the same description, would say, "Tell the woman she must not let a drop of water come near her or she will surely die." Another, with a wise look and much stroking of the beard, would tell the Assyrian that his wife must lie in the full glare of the sun all the summer, absorbing the healing rays of the sun into her body, and she would

never again know pain, providing that she drank of the milk of a white camel daily until she was healed. And yet another, having heard the same story, would vow by his father's grave that the woman must be kept in a shady place, where no ray of sunlight fell, and drink nothing but oil made from the purest olives. Some counselled him to feed her upon baked meats, others declared with much vehemence that meat of any kind would kill her. To all of these wise men the Assyrian gave a piece of money, vowing that he would follow their instructions to the letter. Then he would skilfully seek information concerning Samson, the champion of the Hebrews. When he obtained what he sought, he would go upon his way smiling in his own beard, and as soon as he got a safe distance from the town he would throw the physic to the dogs that barked at the heels of his camel, for he was a silent man and a wise. So in the end he found the man he sought.

When that Assyrian saw Samson he marvelled, for the Hebrew was then in the full glory of his manhood. He lay upon a bank of flowers beside a stream that foamed between its walls like an

angry child, and the young damsels sang songs for his pleasure. The Assyrian veiled his eyes, thinking within himself, "This is indeed a man for men to fear, a woman is the weapon with which to undo him." But his thoughts did not appear upon his face, neither did he let them creep into his speech when he delivered Delilah's message to Samson.

Leaning upon his elbow, with his yellow hair falling around his bare arm, with the silken masses of his beard blowing all about his uncovered chest, the greatest of the Hebrews listened to the tale the Assyrian had to tell. Not once, from the time the man was brought before him until he had ceased speaking, did he take his blue eyes from the swarthy face of the messenger; and Samson had this power—that he could, like the eagle, look into the eye of the sun without winking; neither man nor beast could stand his gaze without blenching. When the Assyrian had ceased speaking, Samson said, "Thou hast indeed brought me news, O traveller; now, if thou art a man's son and no weakling, veil not thine eyes, but look me in the face, for I love not a coward."

The hot blood mounted to the dusky cheek of the messenger. "My life is in the hollow of thy hand, my lord," he cried; "take it, if it is thy wish, but heap not insults on the head of thy servant. A coward I am not; no man-child that fed at my mother's breasts was ever a coward. I came to thee from the woman who sent me—for a price. Knowing the dangers of the journey, my message may suit thee well or ill—that is my lord's matter; but if any here, warrior or king, calls me coward, the shame be his and his children's, for his tongue is the tongue of a liar and the truth is a stranger to him." When the young men who stood near heard those bold words, they would have slain the traveller; but Samson, leaping to his feet with a great bound, clapped the man upon the back, and bade those who frowned take their hands from their weapons and bring food and drink for the Assyrian. "May the God of battles," he shouted, "give me such servants as thou art when my need is greatest, for whether thy tale be true or false, thou art true to thy salt."

It was moonlight in the Valley of Sorek. Like the eye of God the beautiful moon lay in the

breast of the boundless blue. A cold wind swept the valley and ruffled the surface of the river; a wolf, scenting the cattle in the pens, howled in the thickets on the hills; no lights twinkled in the homes of the husbandmen, only in the home of Delilah was a lamp burning; the child slept peacefully within upon a bed made of skins. At the door a man was standing, knocking stealthily. Delilah rose from her seat by the sleeping child, and went to the door and flung it wide. The man would have crossed the threshold, but the woman stopped him with a fierce gesture. "Who art thou that comest to me like a thief in the night?" she called, with savage scorn in her voice.

The man replied, "Call not so loud, Delilah; I come to thee with a gift in my hand. Speak softly, I pray thee, lest all the tongues in the valley be wagging on the morrow." But she would not hearken to him. "Take thy shadow from the threshold of my door, and take thy gift with thee; thinkest thou I do not know the whining of a dog when I hear it? Get thee gone, and to-morrow tell thy wife that the woman Delilah tried to tempt thee from her, but thou

being pure spat at her and would have none of her." "These be bitter words," said the man; "I did but bring a little offering for the child, thy son, seeing that he is fatherless and friendless." "How good thou art, how kind," mocked the woman. "If I met thee with thy fellows to-morrow in the light of day, and the little one, my son, thirsted, wouldst thou give him as much as a cup of cold water? Get thee gone, thou prowling dog, wouldst thou eat what a lion has killed? Get thee gone, I tell thee, or I will raise the life of the valley with my cries." At that the man's anger rose, and he railed back like a woman, giving taunt for taunt. "'What a lion killed,' sayest thou, Delilah? Does a lion kill and skulk away, as thy lover did? Thou hast called me a dog, yet if thy unknown lover were here I would show thee which is the lion and which the unclean beast."

At that a strange thing happened. Out of the shadows that lay thick on the far side of the house a man stepped almost noiselessly—a great man, whose hair waved in the wind like the mane of a stallion. He reached out his arm and caught the "bringer of gifts" by the cloth around



SO SAMSON CARRIED HIM TO A SPOT WHERE A HERD OF SWINE WERE

his loins, and turned him round as easily as a child handles a hedge-sparrow. Delilah clapped her hands with glee, for the "bringer of gifts" was one who had been a thorn in her flesh. No tongue in the valley had bruised her more often than his; none had mocked her more openly or wearied her more in secret than he; therefore when she saw him in the hands of Samson, like a lamb in the talons of an eagle, her heart rejoiced, and she called to him to smite the boaster. Whereat the man cried, "Mercy, my lord, mercy! make not my children fatherless." So Samson carried him to a spot where a herd of swine were sleeping up to their bellies in mire, and Samson cast the "bringer of gifts" into the filth, telling him that if he stirred from thence until the morning he would seek him out and slay him. The man obeyed, for he was nearly dead with fear; the mire into which he had been cast was an offence to the nostrils; the wind was piercing cold, so that man was glad to crawl in amongst the swine for warmth and shelter, but the swine received him not.

When he had rid himself of the fellow, Samson went back and stood in the shadows, but Delilah

came out and sought him, crying, "What evil have I done in my lord's sight that he should hate me?" Catching him by the skirt of his garment, she tried to draw him with her to the house. Samson put her from him gently, speaking kindly, "I will abide here, and watch over thee until the night be passed; then, when it is morning, and all the men of Sorek are astir to see me, then will I come to thy side; but I will not come to thee, as that other one came, like a robber in the night. Openly, I found thee at the first, in daylight I wooed thee and won thy love; openly, I brought shame upon thee, so that all men mocked thee; now, openly, will I come and confirm my love. A gift have I brought with me for the elders of the valley: sweet-smelling ointment of great price fit for a king, myrrh, frankincense, and spices, a piece of silk, and some fine linen, with a tablet of gold and a cake of silver. All these things are with me for a peace-offering; but if they will have none of it, and will not make peace with me, then thou and the child shall come with me, and I will cut a path for you with my sword." But she would not let him go; laying her head upon his breast,

weaving her soft fingers in his yellow beard, she enticed him to stay. "What does it matter to thee, thou mighty one, what these people say concerning thee and me? The worst that can be said has been said, tongues can do me no more harm. Abide with thy handmaiden now or let the edge of thy sword fall on my neck." At that Samson yielded, for, with a woman, this man, who feared not to face a host, sword in hand, was as unstable as water. As a woman twists a piece of silk round a ball of wool, so she turned the man of many battles with the pleading of her tongue and the soft upward glances of her eyes.

At sunrise, whilst her lord still slept, she went forth singing gaily, and found "the bringer of gifts" crouching amongst the swine. To him she said, "Wouldst thou be a byword, thou and thy children after thee, for ever, or wilt thou redeem thyself?" And the man abased himself before Delilah, professing his willingness to do whatsoever she might command him, so that she would not tell in the valley the shame that had come to him. "Go then to the river and wash, and when thou art clean take a fleet ass's colt and go seek that merchant who was here but a

short time back. Where he dwelleth thou knowest, for he told it to all men. And when thou hast found him, ask for the woman who is called the 'seller of doves,' and when thou hast found her, say to her, 'In the Valley of Sorek a stag is browsing, wherefore do the huntsmen tarry?' " For so she had agreed with the "seller of doves." And that man went swiftly, marveling greatly at the ways of women.

All that day Delilah made life very sweet to Samson, and at evening she enticed him to go with her amongst the people, meaning to betray him as the Hebrew Samson who had stained his hands with the blood of the people of Philistia. "Leave thy sword and thy spear, I pray thee, my lord, and bring thy gifts in thy hands; then all will be well with thee and me. But if the people see thee with a sword upon thy thigh, and a spear in thy hand, their anger may be kindled against both thee and thy handmaiden." But he would not leave his weapons of war behind him. "I will go amongst them as a man of war, ready for war; it would be a shame to me to be snared like a fox of the fields. If they will accept peace with a gift, then we shall

make a feast; if not, then more women shall sleep without husbands to-night in Sorek than ever before."

When the people saw Samson come again amongst them, armed and ready for battle, they were amazed. When he offered them his peace-offering, they chanted his praises; and the good women, who of old time had reviled Delilah, were the first to press around her to kiss her upon the cheeks and call her the sunbeam of Sorek. They made a feast in Samson's honour, and Delilah stood behind her lord and waited upon him as of old time, smiling into his eyes when he pledged her in the winecup; but all the time the memory of her wrongs, of her long months of shame and suffering, were uppermost, and she hated him with all her might, for the woman's memory began where the man's left off. When her lord was mellow with wine, and had laid aside his weapons of war, she drew the chief man of the valley aside into a quiet place, and said unto him, "Knowest thou who this is whom thou featest?" The greybeard answered sententiously, "He is one whom we all delight to honour, more than that I know not." Whereat

she told him who Samson was, and advised him to get the men of Sorek to fall upon him whilst he was merry, and put him to the sword. The greybeard told his fellows; they in turn told the people; and a great hatred of Samson rose up in their hearts, for they all, old and young, had heard of the evil he had wrought in other parts of their country. Still they feared to attack him, for the fame of his strength and courage had gone abroad and had lost nothing by travelling.

The day following, one came to Delilah as she spread some linen on the pomegranate hedge to dry, after taking it from the river, saying to her, "The elders of our people have sent me to thee, charging me to tell thee that if thou canst find out the reason of this Hebrew's strength, and can rob him of it, so that we may kill him, then all the desires of thy heart shall be gratified." And she, thirsting for vengeance upon him, laid many snares for his undoing, but with all his fondness he had the craft of his people, and she could not snare him.

CHAPTER IX

THE COMING OF THE APOSTATE

THE "bringer of gifts" reached Jair in due season. He did not loiter upon the way, for the wrath that was in him kept him moving. He did not understand his mission very thoroughly, but he had grasped enough of its import to know that through him, if his errand was successful, evil would fall upon the man who had made him pass a whole night in the company of a herd of swine, and the memory of that night was very close to his soul in his downsitting and his uprising. He found first the merchant, who took him to the "seller of doves," to whom he gave Delilah's message. She promptly carried him to Jair, who made him re-deliver his message.

When the Apostate heard it, and knew its significance, he forgot Dagon the god of the Philistines whom he had once worshipped; he

forgot the gods of the Assyrians, whom he had recently taken under his wing; and his mouth, if not his heart, went back to the God of his boyhood, the God of his younger manhood, the God of Israel. "Now I know, O my God, that thou hast delivered mine enemy into my hand," he murmured. "Strong as Samson is, a woman's hair will hold him if it be as beautiful as the hair of this woman of Sorek." Calling his steward to him, he bade him take a gift in his hand and give it to the wise man who interpreted the King's dreams. The steward, who was a wise man in his day and generation, took a great gift to the wise man; but first he deducted a portion thereof for himself, saying, "The ass that beareth a bag of corn is worthy of a little that is spilled over the edges." When the wise man received the gift from the steward, he asked the servant, "What does thy master want from me in return?" The steward replied, "He wanteth nothing, it is a gift straight from the heart of my master." The wise man answered, "Convey then my gratitude to him that sent thee—may his dreams be sweet!" But the steward answered, "Nay, that will I not do. Canst thou

not see him and thank him with thy mouth? words that are second-hand are cold." "So that, then, is thy master's wish; he would have speech with me," laughed the seer. "When the shadows fall, I shall be with him." And he was as good as his word.

When he was alone with Jair, the Hebrew said, "I am but a fool by the wayside, but thou art a wise man amongst wise men, therefore I will not try to throw dust in thine eyes, but will deal straightly with thee, for it is in my heart to ask a favour of thee, seeing thou hast the King's ear at all times. In the Valley of Sorek, in Philistia, an enemy dwells whose blood is dearer to me than gold, or ease, or precious stones. He is not of that country, but a stranger. Now, if I go down and slay him, the Philistines may rise against me; but if I go to Philistia with a message of friendship from the King of Assyria, I shall have weight with the Philistines, and they will hearken to my counsels. Now I know that every morning the King asketh thee to interpret his dreams of the night; canst thou not see in the King's next dream a reason why he should send a message of friendship to Philistia, and

after that will it not be easy to induce the King's chamberlain to choose thy servant for that mission?"

The "interpreter of dreams" drew forth an empty purse and laid it under the eyes of Jair, saying, "This is a weighty matter, I will close my eyes and consider it." But, when he heard Jair filling the purse from his pouch, he opened one eye to see if it was gold or silver the money-lender was giving him. Had it been silver, he had another little bag in his other hand ready to place before Jair; but it was not silver, but gold—and he was satisfied.

"May I break in upon thy meditations, holy one?" asked Jair, when the purse was filled. The "holy one" thereupon opened his eyes, and, seeing the full purse, put it in his pouch, declaring it would help him to feed the poor. At that Jair cried very bitterly, "Do not give it all to the poor, rob not thyself, holy one." And the "holy one," rising, besought Jair not to let that thought disturb his sleep or keep him from a full meal, and so left.

When he had departed out into the night, Jair went and spat on the place where he had sat,

calling on Dagon, on the gods of Assyria, and on the God of Israel, to send plagues of boils on the "seer of dreams," so that he might never again sit in peace; for Jair's heart was very sore at the loss of his money.

The next morning the King asked his seer concerning this dream which he had dreamed: A cloud, large and black, arose at a far distance, and a white horse and an ass looked into the cloud; the ass advanced and was swallowed up, but the horse went upon its way.

The seer went into a chamber alone to consult his oracles, and none of those who stood around dared to speak above his breath. When he was alone, with the door barred, the seer drew from a hidden place a skin of wine and drank boldly; then he trimmed his beard, using a copper shield as a mirror, for after he had read the King's dream he would go to the women's court and interpret their dreams, and he was but middle-aged, and vanity had not yet departed from him. When a sufficient time had elapsed, he unbarred the door and went forth and stood before the King. And the King asked him, saying, "Have the oracles spoken?" And the

seer replied, "O king, I cannot lie even for thy sake, the oracles have spoken, and this is the interpretation of thy dream: 'The black cloud which thou sawest is the land of Philistia, the white horse was my lord the King, the ass was a stranger who dwelleth within thy gates. There is trouble in the land of Philistia, and my lord the King will send the stranger with a message of goodwill to the ruler of Philistia. The messenger may not return, but all will be well with my lord.'"

The King was delighted with the interpretation of his vision, and commanded his chamberlain to at once choose out a stranger in the city and send him forthwith to Philistia with a message of kind words. The chamberlain bowed his forehead to the ground, crying, "Great is my lord the King, wisdom is his inheritance, who can deceive him? Blessed are the servants of the King who are allowed to gather up the wise sayings which fall from the lips of the King; when the King dieth, wisdom will depart from the earth and a new god will be created. Blessed be the name of the King." But when the chamberlain had got out of earshot of the courtiers, he said unto the "expounder of

dreams," "Tell me, I pray thee, who is the fellow whom thou wantest driven out of the country, and how much is the deed worth to thee?" For the chamberlain knew the ways of seers and expounders of visions; he had not been a courtier all his days for nought.

Now this speech vexed the seer, so that he answered, "Why camest thou to me in this fashion, seeking to offend me? Or is it that thou hast looked even thus early upon the winecup?" The high chamberlain laughed scornfully, and, plucking the seer by the robe, said, "Let that matter pass, it was an idle thought; but there is another matter. Last night I too slept as did my lord the King, and I also had a dream. Wilt thou make it plain to me, O seer?" And the seer said, "Say on." "I dreamt that our lord the King, and all his captains, wise men, and councillors, were locked in a great garden surrounded by high walls of stone, and they were all very happy; for our lord the King allowed each man to pluck and share of the fruit that grew in the garden. And all were content until, on an evil day, a fellow of the baser sort found favour with our lord the King, and the King put his hand upon his head and blessed him. From that hour

the low-born one thought only of himself, and his head began to grow. Day by day it grew greater and greater, until it filled all the garden; so great was his head that, when he opened his mouth, all the ripe fruit fell into it, and there was nothing for his fellows. So they gathered themselves together, and determined to cut off the base one's head and cast it out of the garden, and then tell our lord the King that the base one had conspired with the King's enemies to bring shame upon him. But one of the King's councillors, who cared not for bloodshed, went to the base-born one and told him to mend his ways or he would find sorrow. Then, O seer, I awoke, and my dream seemed dark unto me."

The "expounder of dreams," looking beyond the high chamberlain, saw the captain of the King's guard lurking among the trees with a drawn sword in his hand, so he answered, "Nay, I cannot aid thee, for I too had a dream which I must tell thee, perhaps it may guide thee to the light. I dreamt that I was called to the house of the money-lender who is a stranger within our gates, and in my dream he said to me, 'Here is a purse of gold to be divided between thee and the high

chamberlain, if thou canst arrange that I be sent with a message of peace and goodwill to the Philistines on behalf of our lord the King; and I dreamt that I took the purse.'” At that saying the high chamberlain laughed outright, and cried, “If thou hadst not taken it, then would I have known thy dream to have been false—a nightmare begotten of over-much eating at the banquet table. Hast thou the proof of thy dream with thee?” The “expounder of dreams” drew forth the purse given him by Jair, uttering many sighs as he did so, for he loved gold with all his heart.

“We will divide it into two equal parts, that my dream may be fulfilled,” he moaned, wringing his hands despairingly. “That may not be,” replied the high chamberlain; “into three equal parts must we divide it, for the captain of the King’s guard is nigh and he also hath a vision”; whereupon he beckoned the soldier to advance. The captain came forward, laughing, whilst the “expounder of visions” tore his beard out of very wrath. “Tell this wise man thy dream,” commanded the high chamberlain, with a lowering of one eyelid and an upward turning of the thumb. The soldier, leaning upon his sword, looked grimly

at the seer, then spake : " I, too, dreamed a dream. In this very garden I walked, and saw a kite and an eagle rending a kid ; and when I advanced to slay them the eagle said to me, ' Why wouldst thou who, being a soldier, lovest spoil, slay us ? Draw thy sword and cut the kid in three parts ; one for thee, one for me, and one for this thing here, who deserves a portion, inasmuch as it was he that discovered the kid.' Canst thou read my vision aright ? " " Let us divide the kid quickly," answered the " expounder of dreams," " lest some other one cometh with a fresh nightmare, and I carry away nothing—not even an empty purse. Verily this land of Assyria is becoming too full of dreamers for an honest seer to make any profit out of his calling." And, so saying, he snatched up his portion and fled. " Come now, let us go down into the city and find this money-lender, I and thou," chuckled the chamberlain ; " we will also make him see visions, and we will interpret them for him. Has he not wounded the honour of our lord the King by offering a bribe to his seer ? "

When the chamberlain and the captain of the King's guard reached Jair's house they entered

without ceremony, as men having authority enter the house of a wrong-doer. They pushed rudely into the apartment set aside for the women, and there saw the two female slaves whom Jair had won when he was victorious in the race of spears. The two women were arrayed in rich apparel, with gold chains and ornaments upon them, for so Jair loved to see them. "There is the price of our silence concerning the man's crime, and his passport also to Philistia," whispered the high chamberlain. "So be it," answered the soldier; "thou shalt take the dark one and the fair one will come to me." "Not so fast, soldier; callest thou that a fair division of the spoil? We will not quarrel; a throw of the dice shall decide."

Then Jair entered, and when he saw the soldier with the high chamberlain he was troubled, knowing he had been betrayed. And they worked their will upon him. As for the women, they were glad to go, for they said, "Now we shall have a lord each." Jair had been moved to wrath when the "expounder of visions" had dipped so deeply into his purse; this time he nearly shed his own blood—for the market price of the women, without their ornaments, was very great; and they had

much gold and silver upon them in wristlets, anklets, earrings, and chains. Yet he knew that he was powerless in the hands of the spoilers; they only had to raise their voices against him and his body would be flung to the kites.

“I will be avenged of them when I shall have settled this matter that lieth between me and Samson. By my beard, I will have tooth for tooth! I will lend money to their enemies without interest, that they may cut the ground from under them.” Then a new pang smote him; if he lent money to the enemies of his enemies without interest he would be robbing himself. That thought was like a fever in his blood, it was the pouring of vinegar into an open wound. He knew not what to do to console himself; his anguish of spirit was very great. First of all, he put away from him his silk and fine linen, borrowing from one of his servants a garment to cover his nakedness. This he rent in many places to ease his grief; then, removing the carpet from the floor of his dwelling, he heaped ashes on his head and groaned, fasting all that day and night; but no peace came to him. His spirit was sore bruised and joy gone out of him.

Finding that no ease came to him, he rose up and went into an inner room, where an idol worshipped by all his Assyrian servants was kept; oil lamps burned in front of the idol day and night, for Jair was wise when his blood was cool, and he knew it was good to appear like one of the faithful in any land where he dwelt. This night he closed the door where the idol rested, and drew the curtains of the windows; then in his rage he pranced before the idol, calling it foul names, insulting it and all its worshippers. He spat upon its face, and defiled its feet, yet the roof fell not. So Jair's frenzy grew upon him until, in his madness he took a great hammer and broke the head of the idol, which was made of ivory cunningly carved. No sooner had he done this thing than he remembered that the idol was his own, and might have been sold for its weight in silver, and he sat down and shed tears of blood.

In the dawn his servants came to worship, and saw what had been, and they fled from the house, both bond and free; for they said the dwelling was accursed. The priests came to him, threatening his life; but he told them an enemy had done this thing whilst he slept. They, however,

were moved to wrath against him, and seeing that the god was manufactured out of precious wood inlaid with ivory, and that the head might be mended by a cunning artificer, they took it away with them, taking also all the wine that was in the house to pour out as libations to their god—so they said; though, from the manner in which they smacked their lips when they saw the juice of the grape, Jair thought in his bitterness that he knew where most of the wine would be poured when once the doors of the temple were closed.

Jair feared to say anything, for he knew that unless the priests blessed his house before they departed, not one of his servants, bond or free, would return to him again, neither would any come to transact business. Thus was the god avenged upon Jair.

As soon as he could, he set his house in order, selling all that he possessed in the land, because he knew that once having tasted of his money, the high chamberlain and the captain of the King's guard would never more give him any peace, but would pursue him as a wolf pursues a doe whose blood it had tasted. Therefore he

made up his mind to return no more to that country.

A thought came to him: why should he not dwell in peace in the Valley of Sorek, after Samson was undone? Had he not bought the goodwill of the people by his gift to them in their time of tribulation? So he reasoned; forgetting that the shadow of the hand of the God of Israel lay always across his path.

Many things that were precious he packed upon his camels; his merchant and the "seller of doves" got all things in readiness, and once more Jair set out for the land of Philistia.

As he journeyed, a great yearning came over him to see again the people of Israel in their tents; to hear again the songs his people loved, sung in the Hebrew tongue; to lift up his voice in supplication to the God of his fathers. And his heart was very heavy, for he knew himself a thing accursed — a wanderer and an outcast.

Then it was that he cried in bitterness of spirit, "Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, 'A man child is born unto thee.'" Yet his heart never wavered in the pursuit of

vengeance. So, through the glare of noonday and the shades of evening, the caravan pushed on into the land of the Philistines, and Jair made himself known as the bearer of good tidings from the King of Assyria, and his way was made straight for him.

The men of war did him homage, and the councillors hung upon his words. A place was prepared for him where he might take his ease, and there were no thorns in his path.

Having made himself secure in high places, he sent his merchant with the "seller of doves" to Sorek, charging them to let him know how it fared with his enemy; for he dared not face Samson even with all the men in the valley at his back, knowing that whoever else might escape he would fall.

During the idle days that followed, word was brought to him that a number of Hebrew maidens had been brought captive to the city; a feud having arisen between the men of Israel and the men of Philistia who dwelt upon the borders. As soon as Jair heard that news he went to look at the damsels, and there was one amongst them who was good to behold. Then

Jair's heart yearned for one of his own blood and speech to bear him company through the years that stretched between him and the grave. And he asked that the damsel might be given to him; saying, "I am a lonely man, neither wife nor child have I to cheer me, give the damsel to me as a peace-offering between thee and me." And they gave her to him, because of the message he had brought from Assyria.

When the damsel was brought before Jair in his house, he dismissed his servants and beckoned the maiden to come to him. But she, thinking he was going to treat her as a slave, or as a wanton woman of no account, tore her vestment asunder, leaving her white bosom bare. Holding back her raiment with her two hands, she cried to him, "Death is preferable to defilement! I am of the children of Israel, bury thy sword here between my two breasts, and let there be an end of the matter."

Jair smiled upon her, and spake to her in the Hebrew tongue, saying, "Fear not, for I too am of the chosen people, and I want thee for a wife not for a wanton. Like thee, I am forced to dwell apart from our own people; but we will

dwell together, and our children and our children's children shall spoil these uncircumcised dogs."

He put a ring of gold upon her finger, and a chain of fine gold about her neck; his servants bowed down before her and arrayed her in fine linen, and she was his wife. But the rest of the Israelitish damsels who came into captivity with her were portioned out as slaves amongst the lords of the Philistines. And they foregathered at Jair's house, whenever they could steal away from their taskmasters, to talk over their tribulations, and recall the happy days when they were free; so that the house of the Apostate became a haven of refuge in a strange land, for they knew nothing of his iniquities.

There were other slaves in the city, and they heard of Jair's house and of his hospitality, and they sought him out; but some failed to find him, so that he said, "I will make a sign which shall be in front of my house for ever, so that those who are sore pressed may know where I dwell." He commanded his artificers to hang three golden balls in front of his dwelling; for he said, "The three balls shall be a sign that

there is gold inside for myself, for my wife, and for the stranger who calleth upon me in distress—at a price.”

And that sign grew to be greater in the land than the sign of sword or spear; and it existeth even unto this day, for the offspring of Jair increased and multiplied, spreading all over the earth. Taking no part in councils of state nor in matters of war, living by usury alone; so shall they live unto the end of time.

When the women gathered at Jair's house they made music with harps and timbrels, and when one stole a dagger of price, or a ring, or a chain of cunning workmanship, she brought it to Jair, who sent it into a far country at the hands of his merchant. Three parts of the profit he thus obtained he kept for himself, the other part he gave to his wife to set aside for the Hebrew slave, so that she might purchase her freedom when she had amassed enough to do so.

At last, after much waiting, the “seller of doves” came to Jair and told him these things: “Samson is still with Delilah in the valley, but the people dread him too much to fall upon him

and kill him. Again and again she has enticed them, but their hearts turn to water when he upreareth himself in front of them. Come now, and give Delilah thy counsel, for she too is growing weary of the struggle."

Now, in Jair's household there was an Assyrian slave skilled in the making of poisons from the herbs of the field and from flowers and berries, and she had her ear to the door whilst Jair and the "seller of doves" were talking, so that she knew all that was in her master's heart. When the "seller of doves" had gone about her own business, the slave asked, "Why is the heart of my lord heavy? why does the raven sit upon his brow? Is it because of one who is an enemy to my lord?"

Then Jair cursed her for a meddler. "Keep thine ear from the crack in my door, thou hag, or thy back shall have the whip for a lover." The slave retorted vehemently to his anger, "Let the whip kiss my back, wilt thou gain anything by the caresses? Thou knowest less than a dog, for a dog does not bark at a friend, and I could show thee that which would give this great enemy of thine into thine hand without lifting bow or

spear. I will strike a compact with thee. If I show thee how a flower can lay a man low, so that a woman may make him a fool and ashamed, no matter how strong he may be, wilt thou in turn set me free, and give me an ass and two skins of Syrian wine, that I may sell them and live?" And Jair swore that he would do all that and more.

The slave walked with him in the cornfields, and it was near to the time of harvest; the corn was ready for the sickle of the reapers. Amidst the corn great scarlet poppies grew, red eyes in the yellow face of the field. The slave gathered a handful of the poppies, which she took home and bruised, extracting the sap from the flowers and stem. This she put away in a little jar and sealed, so that no air could get to it; when all was in readiness, she gave the jar to her master, saying, "Send that to the woman who is willing to betray thine enemy. Tell her to wait until he is merry with wine, then drop a few drops into the skin out of which he is served, and let him drink. He will be so heavy with sleep that a child will be able to work shame upon him. Tell her to do this and fear not, for all the strength

will have departed from him, so that the noise of a battle would not arouse him."

Then was the heart of Jair merry within him, and he made a feast, and the slaves danced to the harping of his wife.

When the morrow came, he took the little jar with him and departed with his merchant and the "seller of doves" to the Valley of Sorek. On arriving at the outskirts of the valley he hid himself in a house on the hill, and sent the "seller of doves" to bring Delilah to him in secret. Whilst he awaited her, he saw Samson walking in the valley, and a great awe fell upon Jair, for no man on whom his eyes had ever rested could compare with this great offshoot of his own country. The passing years had but added to the glory of his manhood, he looked fit to be the leader of a host. The tillers of the soil glared at him as he passed by them, but a glance from him sent them afar with speed.

In spite of his hate, Jair's heart was full of pride that such an one should spring from the loins of Israel. He was still meditating upon the beauty of the champion of his race when Delilah stood in front of him; and the "seller of doves"

said, "This is the woman." When Jair saw her he marvelled, for she was a woman of wondrous fairness; yet he spoke to her as one who had but little faith in women. "Thou art the woman; will thy heart fail thee? The man whom thou wilt betray is not as other men, and he has tarried long with thee. Is it not more likely that thy desires will be even as his?" Delilah gave him scorn for scorn: "Judge not a woman always by the company she keeps. Hast thou not yet learned that it is fleas that go to the dog, not the dog to the fleas?" And that saying pleased him greatly.

Drawing the jar containing the sap of the poppy flowers from under his cloak, he gave it into her keeping, charging her to make a feast that night; then, when Samson was merry, to drug him. "When he is at thy mercy, woman, take a sharp knife and cut his hair and his beard short off to the skin, and hasten hither with it. Then will I come and lead the men of the valley to do that which must be done. Now go, and may Dagon give thee cunning."

THE DOWNFALL

The feast was spread amongst the olive trees that surrounded the home of the woman Delilah; young men made music with reed-pipes, maidens danced and played merrily upon the timbrel, the winecup circled joyously. Samson reclined in state upon a dais that had once held the image of the god Dagon, a lion's skin spread over a heap of fox skins was his resting-place. Below him, but within reach of his spear, sat the headmen of the valley, for Samson trusted them not; in all that company, Delilah was the only one in whom he had faith.

She filled his cup with wine and held it to his lips; bending down as she did so, she whispered in his ear, "Lay not thy sword so far from thy hand, my lord. These men bear thee no real love. Let my lord be ready to smite if they try to deal treacherously with thee." Whereat Samson laughed mightily: "Woe to them and woe to their children if they rise against me. I am weary of peace, Delilah, my sinews grow slack. I long for the scent of battle, and to a warrior a battle against odds is the salt of life."

“Drink, my beloved,” she answered, pressing the wine upon him; “drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” And again Samson drank of the drugged wine.

After a little time he raised his heavy eyes to her face: “Thou art the fairest amongst women, Delilah. I must take thee to my own people, that the maidens of Israel may die of envy, and our poets grow dumb for want of words to sing thy praises. Bid these swine-herds begone, for I am weary; I want none near me but my beloved.”

Delilah’s heart was beating fiercely; yet her speech was soft, and the touch of her hand upon his fevered brow was like snow falling softly. Shortly and curtly she broke in upon the feast, scattering the merrymakers to their homes as sheep scatter when a leopard growls. Then she was left alone with Samson. Crouching behind him she saw his head fall back until it lay upon her knees. She looked into his face—the proud face she had caressed so often—and saw that the ruddy colour had faded from his cheeks. Then she shook him violently, saying, “Up, Samson! up and fight for thy life; the Philistines be upon thee!” But the heavy head only rolled from knee to knee in

her lap. Swiftly she drew a sharp knife from her girdle and shorn the beautiful locks, which had been the pride and glory of the Judean girls, close off to his head; and Samson, stirring a little in his heavy slumber, murmured, "Kiss me, my beloved, thou art the fairest amongst ten thousand."

The woman gathered the golden masses of his beard in her slender palm, opening her knees to let his head fall back until the throat gleamed white in the flickering light; then, with a bold, strong stroke, she drew the blade through the curling hair, within a hair's-breadth of the chin, dropping the dishonoured head upon the lion's skin. Tossing the knife away, she ran hot-foot to Jair, carrying in one hand the tangled beard, in the other the ravished hair of the hope of Israel.

When Jair saw the hair in the woman's hand, he knew that the worst that could come had come to his enemy. Without a word he rose up and went down into the valley, and gathered the men of Sorek about him until not one was left. But Delilah went back and watched beside her lord.

The dawn, the swift unushered dawn of the far east, was breaking swiftly, when Jair called to the



SHE DREW THE BLADE THROUGH THE CURLING HAIR

woman, saying, "Bid thy lord awake, his hour has come." Delilah knelt and shouted in the dreamer's ear, "Samson, awake, the Philistines be upon thee!" He shook himself slowly and weakly. She shouted again, and the people laughed.

The slumbering giant raised himself upon his elbow, and glared around with heavy, bloodshot eyes. Then stretching out his hand for his sword, he rose; and as he rose the laughter died on every lip. The men turned, ready to flee; Jair's face grew as white as the face of the man in front of him.

Only the woman, having risked all, dared all; she raised her hand and struck at the sword. It fell from his trembling fingers as though stricken by a thunderbolt. Slowly, like a smitten stag, he turned his eyes upon the face of the woman, and in that glance read all. She had meant to mock him, to jeer at him in that evil hour; but that glance laid the iron hand of silence upon her mouth—she bowed her head and passed onward, out of history.

The men pressed in upon him, mocking him. All that man could do to man they did, whilst

Jair the Apostate looked on. He saw them bind the great limbs with fetters of brass; saw the blush of shame mantle cheek and brow, but looked in vain for a sign of fear; and even in his hour of triumph knew himself unworthy to touch the hem of the warrior's garment.

He looked again, and saw the executioner bend over the handsome face. His ears were filled with the laughter and the jests of a mob; he strained them to catch a groan, and strained in vain. He heard the mob shriek: "Behold him now, the mighty one!" He looked once more, and saw the eyeless face with two crimson streaks running down the cheeks into the stubble of the beard; then turning, fled.

Of the children whom Jair begat none were warriors or statesmen, neither they nor their children's children. All were usurers and traffickers in treachery; until, in the Garden beyond the brook Cedron, one betrayed for thirty pieces of silver a greater than Samson.

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